

SEARCHES IN SIKHISM

THOUGHT, UNDERSTANDING, OBSERVANCE

Nirmal Singh



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© Author

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To

Priyanka, Neha, Param, Nina, Aneel & Aneesha

Our grand children,

whose fond love fills our days,

and whose curiosity and interest in their heritage

continues to inspire our optimism and

hope for the future.

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Preface

This book is the product of several years of intermittent work – mostly ruminating with spurts of occasional writing. The motivation in all cases came from an inner urge to grasp at least the drift of the sublime message that our Gurus left in words and metaphors that are so captivating and yet as is expected with the mystic thought about the imponderables beyond the span of our finite understanding, so intriguing. The trigger about the choice of the topics was mostly external stimulus – conferences, classroom interactions, inter-faith discussions, experiences in the Gurdwara settings and conversations in some of our active Internet forums.

The setting is today's Sikhi from a vagrant vantage – rooted in India with its paradoxical variety of richness of understanding of the faith, pride in its tradition and yet its complex internal interpretive divisiveness and drift in observances even as the ritualistic seems to be gaining ground in our praxis. The contrast if at all it can be called that, is the Sikhi as I saw in neighboring Pakistan and Afghanistan and the far away UK, USA, Canada and the down under land Australia – all tempered by diverse interactions, with my fellow Sikhs, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Atheists of all shades of opinions, levels of understanding, but all engaged in their own search for the elusive Truth.

I have to thank a lot of people for truly what I may be saying in the book is not all mine own – it is an expression of my understanding as it developed in their association. Some how it starts with the 'kul' – the family – not out of narrow

loyalties, because rightly or wrongly they are the strongest influence. I have to single out Veena, my companion of almost forty-eight years, who has been patient, helpful, critical yet fully supportive. Our daughters Simran, Harleen and Cherry and their families who have facilitated many of the mundane details do deserve my thanks.

Our sangat in Connecticut and now in Central Pennsylvania has been a source of sharing the Guru's blessing and a rich, variegated experience of Sikhi in the American setting. I also greatly benefited by listening and talking to so many of our eminent scholars and thinkers at various conferences. This had great learning value and in rare situations even catalyzed strong urge to revisit for myself some of the conventional understandings being passed around.

There are several persons and organizations that I would like to acknowledge. My fellow devotees at the Blue Mountain Gurdwara in PA – Onkar Singh Grewal, Gursharan Singh, Neena Grewal, Arvinder Kaur Ahluwalia, Shivinder Singh Athwal, Jasvir Kaur Grewal, the actively involved youth and volunteers quietly and assiduously working to keep the institution continue to function in harmony. I want also to recognize Bhupinder Singh Sahi and Navtej Singh Grewal my co-incorporators of Sikh Society of Harrisburg, and our other enthusiastic and supportive members who are working diligently to create a visible and active Sikh sangat in the capital town of PA. Jasbir Singh Bhatia at Orlando, FL and Dr. Atamjit Singh at San Jose State University and Dr. Noel King among several others who have always been supportive and encouraging. I also want to mention some Sikh organizations like Sri Hemkunt Foundation, Sikh Foundation, United Sikhs, Gurmat Learning Zone, Sikh Diaspora and Mata Gujri Trust whose work and activities I found interesting and are reflected in what I have written.

My association with several of my friends from the other faith traditions has helped me learn so much more about our own. Particular mention may be made of Dr. Ibrahim Abu Rabi

at Hartford Seminary; Dr Paul Fullmer, Chaplain Lebanon Valley College; Late Dr Kuldip Gupta and Braham Agarwal at Hindu University of America; my fellow members on the advisory group for Educators Society for Heritage of India; Paul S Penner with whom I had extended exchanges as he worked through his book on the rise of Religious Fundamentalism during the 20th and 21st centuries covering the Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish and Sikh traditions.

The inter-faith and multi-cultural organizations in Connecticut and Central Pennsylvania have been welcoming and provided opportunities to share understanding. Some of their initiatives, works and experiences are indeed praise worthy and did inspire thoughtful introspection about our community involvement.

In the end thanks are due to my publishers, Hemkunt Press who helped bring it all into a presentable form.

Feb. 16, 2008
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Nirmal Singh

Introduction

The essays presented in this book search Sikh thought as gleaned from the Sikh scriptural literature, history, tradition and praxis on some selected themes. The choice of subjects is reflective of my interest or more likely curiosity at the time though in some cases the motivation may have been in response to the call for a conference paper. In the course of my exploration, in some cases our discussion has led to some suggestions but the purpose primarily is to try and comprehend the subjects in their broader context and hope that any further interest and deliberation by the readers would encourage wider conversations that may help us refine our understanding and position.

Even as the range of subjects selected is rather wide I must caution that the book does not cover the totality of Sikh thought or the variegated breadth of Sikh religious life. Those of our readers who are not quite familiar with the Sikh faith tradition would hopefully feel encouraged to access other resources to more comprehensively learn about this relatively less known and possibly lesser understood faith tradition whose tenets seem so eminently relevant to the contemporary world.

I have quoted extensively, and I hope relevantly, from the Guru Granth Sahib and other scriptural resources to explicate my evolving thought. This does bring up an associated difficulty in that some terms and metaphors either because they do not lend to easy translation or because of their popular usage are best used in their original tongue. I have resorted to the use of original terms with necessary explanations in the running text or in the glossary of terms used at the end of the book.

This can be rather distracting but should have its attendant advantage in that it may help the Sikh readers to grasp the meaning in its relevant context and those not familiar may get introduced to and sense the flavor of these expressions.

Some comments about the topics may be helpful though may not necessarily add to what has been presented. The subject of Dharam is an attempt to understand the concept as it relates to Sikh usage. A closer examination may reveal that this usage is suggestive not of a fixed code but an evolving human understanding that informs the individual's selection of action choices in tandem to spiritual development. It thus is symbolic of the undulating link between the mundane and the divine.

My exploration of Contentment was for a conference in Istanbul, Turkey for which I chose to try and juxtapose Sikh thought on the subject with that of Said Nursi, the iconic Turkish savant. The treatment would be of interest to understand the concept as it relates to Islam and Sikhi. The paradox that it seems to unravel is that in a sense developed souls may not be content to be just content for their altruistic passion and compassion tends to become boundless.

Seva is a core Sikh value highly commended by the Gurus and institutionalized by them as a part of the Sikh worship and religious life. It was also intended to provide altruistic service to the needy, poor, sick, deprived, oppressed. The concept has been traced from its scriptural basis through the examples set by the Gurus responding to the needs as they emerged. In a rather extended treatment the subject has been given a closer scrutiny to see how we may be measuring up to what the Gurus had so passionately commended and championed. A brief overview of some contemporary activist organizations has also been included pointing to some areas of concern and some encouraging signs of revival.

In a related strain we have tried to understand the concept of merit flowing to members of sangat, associates and family for the good that men may do. This is a theme that has been

stressed by the Gurus over and over again notwithstanding the common experience that even within close-knit families or groups, members may end up at extremes of the merit scale, as we understand it. The Gurus seem to resolve the complexity by their reference to the pernicious negative effect on associates of the evil. In other words both the good and evil cast their shadows and to receive benefit of the good, one has to have the ability to receive and absorb the reflected glow; evil personal propensities can negate the effect.

Music has a unique place in Sikh worship. It has been highly commended. There is strong suggestion that the entire creation in a way is harmoniously engaged in singing praises of the Creator, with the created world as if floating in the midst of ethereal heavenly music. With music placed at a high pedestal and poetic compositions of the Gurus set to music in the scripture Sikhs are commended to sing praises of God – but cautioned that word is important and not the music. Likewise they are told that let the rhythm of connecting with the divine resonate in your heart and not as gyrations of the body. Sublime and mundane in music and dance therefore may seem close but do not overlap in Sikh thought.

Two presentations delve into the issues of conflict that have dogged the society through the ages and continue unabated today with the twentieth century perhaps having earned the dubious distinction of the bloodiest century in human history. Gurus were deeply concerned about the prevalence of institutionalized discrimination in the social setting of the time, the loss of innocent lives that invaders in search of fortune inflicted on the weak and vulnerable. They saw such calamities rooted in moral decline across all strata of the society. In one of the papers, with the precept as a starting point, a plea has been made that Sikhs as Sikhs, not just Sikh Indians, need to think again about their neighbors on the west and find ways to build some level of mutual respect and understanding at people to people level with Pakistani Muslims.

The other paper attempts to search the way the Gurus

described their mission received by them through divine ordination, their stated positions on issues causing dissonance in the society and their responses as recorded by them in their own words or as received by the Sikhs through history and tradition. The Sikh story emerges as a story of a continued and committed resistance against the unjust, oppressive and discriminative in society. In this process the Gurus introduced significant proactive measures that started to bring about slow but sure directional change. When pressures were put the Gurus did not cave in by giving up on their convictions but rather chose to make extreme sacrifices in the face of oppressive measures. The Gurus did resort to armed defense but the choice was a last resort response where in Guru Gobind Singh's own words, care was taken that those who had not caused them harm were not touched. The common thread that consistently stands out is that the Gurus were only motivated by a strong sense of resolute compassion for the mass of humanity.

One of the papers is devoted to the internal stratification of the community on the basis of level of observance and the tensions that this division is creating. The subject has been discussed in the light of what the scriptures say, the historical accounts and received tradition, the Sikh code of conduct, current laws and the postures and positions of various protagonists. The wide-ranging discussion takes note of the contemporary situation and offers the suggestion that the community would be better advised to find inclusive and empathetic ways to rein in the drift rather than resort to exclusionary approaches as seems to be advocated by some.

This subject assumes serious significance in view of some developments as the book is going to press. The submissions made to the Supreme Court on behalf of SGPC are reported to claim that only those Sikhs who qualify as voters for SGPC elections are real Sikhs. This action motivated to preserve a limited benefit of reservations may well turn out to be another monumental error by the Sikh religious and political leadership.

The paper on the writings of Guru Ram Das was written on the celebratory occasion of the 400th anniversary of installation of Adi Granth or Pothi Sahib. It is a humble homage to the divine wisdom of the Guru and his eternal guidance enshrined in our living Guru.

In the course of writing I may have flipped from the continent to continent while looking at some praxis issues. This is so because the issues and their mix is not the same in India and the Diaspora. There are several facets relating to tradition, rituals and observances that are peculiar to locales. It is understandable for even though the attempt by the SGPC and the Akal Takhat is to encourage a more uniform code of practice, legacy of diverse practices is a continuing part of the Sikh praxis even within the Indian setting.

The interpretation of the texts even though based on several translations and exegesis is expressive of my own understanding as of now. I would respectfully receive suggestions and comments that may help improve my evolving understanding. And now it is on to you, my respected readers. I hope you find reading it of some value.

"HUN HUKAM HOA MEHRVAAN DA" AND NOW THE BENEFICIENT LORD HAS ORDAINED GURU ARJAN'S THOUGHT ON HALEMI RAJ

It was four hundred years back in 1606 that Guru Arjan, the fifth Sikh Guru was tortured to death. He was a man of unmatched piety and compassion during whose ministry the nascent Sikh faith reached an enviable stage of growth and consolidation of its thought and institutions. In his extensive writings preserved in Guru Granth Sahib, he says at one place that "And now the beneficent Lord has ordained" envisioning how a society should be governed. It is not a clearly defined or concise paradigm of divinely ordained political dispensation but a mystic vision colored in deep spiritual hues of a temporal order where human endeavor may experience a peaceful and harmonious expression. There are only scant references to this prophetic saying in most of the Sikh writing. In one, Kapur Singh says that Guru Arjan — made the uncompromising declaration that — "coercive rule of one people over another was against God's will as now revealed to mankind through Sikhism, and all Governments, henceforth, should exercise power, through persuasion and mutual consent and not otherwise."¹ My attempt is to explore and try to grasp the ingredients of the thought that the Guru seems to be conveying, no doubt within the bounds of my limited understanding and ability to take in the essence of the Guru's teachings.

1. Sikhism for the Modern Man, GND Amritsar, p. 46.

HISTORICAL RECAP

A recount of the times of early Gurus should help in bringing a contextual perspective to our search. Punjab, where the faith originated and grew, came to be ruled by a series of Muslim dynasties with the Ghauri's occupation of North India towards the end of 12th century. This was 172 years before the Muslim rule could extend to other parts of India. In the process Punjab became the arena for initial contact and ensuing struggle between Hindus and Muslims. Notwithstanding some Hindu Rajas who continued to rule over small territories, most of Hindus lived in Muslim ruled parts. They resented being ruled by Muslims and their discriminatory practices towards Hindus.

Guru Nanak [1469-1539] in his compositions has given some vivid descriptions of the suffering and plight of people under capricious Muslim rulers. He was also very critical of chicanery of Hindu elite castes that for their own benefit became willing tools of the Muslim rulers to oppress their own.

It was in this setting that the Gurus continued on their missionary of bringing the revealed message to people delivered in their spoken language. For ease of written access the second Guru modified the existing scripts to evolve what has come to be known as Gurmukhi and in which the Guru's compositions were written. In 1604, less than three quarters of a century from passing of Nanak, Guru Arjan brought together authenticated compilation of compositions of the Gurus and some selected writings of saints belonging to diverse traditions that provided a clear theological foundation for the nascent *panth*.

The followers of the Gurus were growing in locations as far apart as Kabul and Dacca. The local congregations called *sangats*, were organized into *piris* and *manjis* under the control of *masands* appointed by the Gurus. The *masands* acted as preachers, provided spiritual guidance to the *sangats*, managed the *dharamsal* activities [prayer services, *kirtan*, *langar*, *serai* &c.] and also collected the *daswandh* offering by the devotees and transmitted it to the Guru. Significantly Sikhs had begun addressing the Guru as *sacha patshah*, the true king and through

effective organization of the *panth* Guru's temporal stature as well as resources had been enhanced.

Increasing number of Hindus and even a segment of Muslims had been gravitating to Guru's discipleship, as their precepts were seen to be inclusive, egalitarian and did not deny opportunity for spiritual quest to anybody. This started to create a lot of uneasiness among Hindus and during the ministry of Amar Das some Brahmin detractors of the Guru complained to Akbar that his practice of allowing all to eat together was ignoring the religious and social distinctions of the Hindus. Ram Das was sent to Lahore to the Emperor's court and explained effectively the Guru's persuasion of equality before God of all human beings. 'When Akbar refused to take action against the Guru, they bribed the local officials to harass the Sikhs. This was the beginning of the oppression of the Sikhs — and the first break with Hindu social polity' says Khushwant Singh.²

Later when Arjan was busy compiling the *Adi Granth*, a report was again sent to Akbar that the anthology contained passages vilifying Islam. Again Bhai Buddha and Gurdas satisfied the Emperor by reading out the alleged hymn to him. Towards the end of Akbar's rule certain influential Muslim clerics like Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi also known as Mujaddid al Sani, who considered himself as the second Prophet of Islam, had started to advocate persecution of infidels and wanted to control the spread of Sikhi before it became a threat to Islam.³

At the same time the Gurus were confronted with a nagging internal problem. Certain family members who felt they had a claim to the Ministry challenged each succession of the Guru even though it was done as directed by the preceding Guru. This divide not only created sects or parallel movements inimical to the *panth* but also degenerated into a personal vendetta against the Guru in the time of Arjan.

Guru Arjan no doubt sensed the confluence of these forces and the gathering dark clouds that might engulf the *panth*.

2. A History of Sikhs, Vol. I, p. 54, 2001.

3. Ibid p. 58 & footnote 22 p. 59.

Some of his compositions reflect on the conflict between Hindu and Muslim thought. In another he articulates the distinct and separate identity of Sikhs. Some others point to motivated attempts at attacks against his person while others allude to a society where discriminatory taxes like *jazia* imposed on Hindus will not be prevalent. We will explore this a bit further by looking at the specific cites from the Granth.

Guru's Reflections on Hindu Muslim Tension

Seeing the continuing tendency among Hindus and Muslims to stick to narrow religious boundaries and theological interpretations, he reminded both that Muslim yearning for – *bahisht* – paradise, and Hindu longing for – *surgindoo* – heaven without an understanding of and living according to God's will is not going to open those doors for them.⁴ We must understand that God by any name – *pir*, *paighambar*, *narayan*, *basudev* – is the One and only merciful Master. He is all pervading and provides support to each and every heart. Allah and Paarbrahm are one and the same.⁵

In another verse, his reference to Hindu-Muslim tensions is more direct when he says that I believe in the one [shared] God – *gusai*, *alloh* – who is the One that brings Hindu and Muslim conflicts to resolution. In this composition he also articulates the separateness of Sikh identity from Hindus and Muslims yet emphasizing that none of us were created as Hindus, Muslims [or any other faith] for our bodies and souls belong to one God – call Him Allah or Ram.⁶

4. *koi kahai turak koi kahai hindoo. koi bachhai bhisat koi surgindoo.— kaho nanak jin hukam pachata prabh sahib ka tin bhed jata* – Ramkali M V, p. 885.

5. *miharvaan maula tuhi ek. pir paikambar sekh.—. narain narhar dayal. ramat ram ghat ghat adhar. basudev basat sabh thaey.— kaho nanak gur khoey bharam. eko alhu parbarahm* – Ramkali M V, p. 897.

6. *varat na rahao na mah ramdana. tis sevee jo rakhai nidana. ek gusae alhu mera. hindoo turak duhaa nebera. haj kabai jao na tirath pooja. eko sevi avar na dooja. poojaa karo na nivaj gujaro. ek nirankar le ridai namaskaro. na ham hindoo na musalman. alah ram kay pind paran* – Bhairo M V, p. 1136.

The Guru was very even handed in his expression even though he did employ different metaphors to get the thought to adherents of these rival faiths. This is evident from the earlier cites and even more vividly clear from the two almost identical compositions, one employing Muslim metaphor and the other using Hindu metaphor included on the same page in the Granth. The purport of the message in both these texts is that all including the gods, prophets, religious texts, clerics et al will pass. Only the One true Creator and His slave will be eternal. Witness:

- Earth, sky, nether regions, moon and sun shall pass. Emperors, bankers, rulers and leaders [*badisah, shah, umrav, khan*] shall depart. All people whether poor, rich, humble or uncaring shall pass. Qazis, Sheikhs and preachers [*masaaik*] shall arise and be gone. Spiritual teachers, prophets and disciples [*peer, paikambar, a-ulee-ay*] - none of these shall remain. Fasts, calls to prayer and sacred scriptures [*roja bang nivaj katayb*] - if their import is not understood shall also vanish as millions of species of beings on the earth continue their cycles of transmigration. Only the One True Lord God and His slave shall be eternal.⁷
- Sacred shrines, idols, temples, and places of pilgrimage like Kedāriath, Mathura and Benares and the millions of gods shall all pass away. Simritees, Shastras, four Vedas and the six systems of philosophy shall vanish. Pandits, religious scholars, poets and their writings will all go as will yogis, celibates, ascetics, quietists or other sages [*jati, sanyasee, muni*]. Whatever is seen is all destined

7. dharat akas patal.hai chand soor binase. badisah sah umrav khan dhahi deray jase. rang tung gareb masat sabh lok sidhasee. kaje sekh masayaka sabhay uth jasee. peer paikaabar auleeay ko thir na rahasee. roja bag nivaj kateb vin bujhay sabh jasee. lakh chorasee maydnee sabh aavai jasee. nihchal sach khudaa-ay ek khudaa-ay banda abhinaasee.- M V, p. 1100, Pauri 17.

to perish. Only the Supreme Lord God and His servant shall be eternal.⁸

On Those Inimical

Guru Arjan as well as other writers in the Granth have decried those who indulged in slander and detraction of the saintly. There are a couple of references in the Guru's compositions that seem to reflect on his own troubling experience. A composition in the Granth says: the Lord saved me from Sulhi Khan. He did not succeed in his plot but died in disgrace. God severed his head and instantly he was reduced to dust. The One who created him destroyed him as he plotted and planned evil.⁹ As the story goes, Sulahi Khan was a Mughal courtier. Prithi Chand invited him and both conspired to finish off Arjan. While showing him round, however Sulahi's horse stepped over a burning kiln that gave way and he was roasted alive.

Another composition also seems to reflect on the fate of detractors and those who oppress weak and poor. It says – God has exhumed by fire the bearded emperor who struck down the poor. The slanderer died of deadly fever. None can save them and their ill repute will go with them in life and hereafter. Through the ages, God administers true justice, is the savior of His slaves and His glory is manifest.¹⁰

8. *tat tirath dev devalia kedar mathura kase. kot tetees devte san indrai jasee. simrit sasar bed char khat daras samasee. pothee pandit geet kavai kavai bhee jasee. jatee satee sanyasea sabh kalai vasee. mun jogee digambra jamai san jasee. jo deesai so vinsana sabh binas binasee. thir parbarahm pamesaro sevak thir hosee* – M V, p. 1100, Pauri 18.

9. *sulhee tay narain raakh. sulhee ka hath kahee na pahuchai sulhee hoey moosaa napak. rahao. kadh kuthar khasam sir kateya khin meh hoey geya hai khak. manda chitvat chitvat pachia jin rachia tin deenaa dhak* – Bilawal M V, p. 825.

10. *gareeba upar je khinjai darhee. parbarahm sa agan meh sarhee. poora niao kare kartar. apunay das ko rakhanhar. rahao. and jugad pargat partap. nindak mua upaj vad tap. tin mareya je rakhai na koey. agai pachhai mandee soey* – Gauri M V, p. 199.

THE LORD'S COMMAND & SOME DISCUSSION ON SEMANTICS

The foregoing gives a flavoring of the times and writings of the Guru that may have some bearing on the totality of the contextual frame in which the Guru gave the call that is our subject. Let us now turn to the poem that incorporates the call and learn what has been articulated. I am giving below a gist of my understanding of the thought contained in the poem but must caution that it is not a translation nor is it presented following the order in which the stanzas have been written:

I heard of the Guru, and so I went to him. I fell at his feet to please and appease him. The true Guru was kind to instill in me the virtues of Naam, charity and inner cleansing. This transformed me to recognize only the One Lord and know of none other. Now Lord of the universe is my dearest love, dearer than my parents, family and friends.

The Lord has assigned me the task to challenge and overcome the five evil instincts. With His grace I prepare to wrestle these five enemies. Ready, I tie a tall, plumed turban as I come to the arena where all have gathered to watch the contest. The merciful Lord also is seated there to behold it. Bugles play and drums beat. The five wrestlers enter the arena and they circle around as I engage them. I throw the five challengers to the ground, and having won, the Guru gives me a pat on the back. In the Guru's Court, God has blessed me with the Robe of Honor.

I joyously call all, my friends, to join the festivities, enjoy and eat. I relate that I came to His sanctuary and with Guru's grace I have taken the five rivals as prisoners. No evil instinct dares to rise within me and I have now become the master of my mind. My body-village was in ruins under vagaries of evil thoughts but now it is populous and prosperous. The Guru has implanted Shabad deep within me and firmly attached Naam to my robe. I meditate on and serve God continually. All my affairs are arranged, my desires are answered and hunger in my mind is appeased. With no entanglements

remaining, I have obtained supreme peace.

So strengthened and with the hand of true Guru upon my forehead I proceed to establish *dharamsal* rooted in truth. I seek out Guru's Sikhs, and bring them into it. I wash their feet, wave fan over them and bowing low, I prostrate before them. Drawing deep on my faith in God I beseech His acceptance and guidance. Softly and gently, droplets of divine nectar trickle down. I speak as my Lord causes me to speak. The Merciful Lord has now conveyed His command that let no one chase after and attack anyone else and let every one abide in peace. Let this – *halemi raj* - benevolent, humble and modest rule prevail.

Let us remember that we all who have come to be together in our lives on this earth, each of us shall return home by a different route. The God oriented *gurmukhs* will reap profit while the self-willed *manmukhs* will lose their investment and depart. For me, the Guru has cut away my bonds and I shall not have to dance in the wrestling arena of life again. Embarked upon this boat of Truth I am united with the Primal Being and liberated.¹¹

-
11. *pai paey manae soey jio. satgur purakh milaya tis jevad avar na koey jio. rahao gosai mehnda ithrha. amm abay thavhu mithrha. bhain bhai sabh sajna tudh jeha nahee koey jio. tayrai hukmay savan aya. mai sat ka hal joaya. nao beejan laga aas kar har bohal bakhsh jamaey jee-o. ho gur mil ik pachhanda. duya kagal chit na janda. har iktai karai laion jio bhavai tivai nibahi jio. tusee bhogihu bhunchahu bhaiho. gur deeban kavaey painaiq. ha-o hoa mahar pind da bann aday panj sareek jio. hao aya samai tihandia. panj kirsan mujayray mihdia. kann koi kadh na hanghee nanak vutha ghugh girao jio. ha-o varee ghumma javda. ik saha tudh dhiida. ujarh thayhu vasao h-o tudh vitahu kurban jio. har ithai nit dhyada. man chindee so fal payada. sabhay kaj savarian laheean man kee bhukh jio. mai chhadia sabho dhandhrhaa. gosai sayvee sachrha. nao nidh naam nidhaan har mai palai badha chhik jio. mai sukh hoo sukh paya. gur antar sabad vasaya. satgur purakh vikhaalia mastak dhar kai hath jio. mai badhee sach dharam sal hai. gursikha lahda bhal kai. pair dhova pakha fayrda tis niv niv laga paey jio. sun gala gur peh aya. naam daan isnaan dirhaya. sabh mukat hoa saisarrha nanak sachee bayrhee charh jio. sabh sarisat sayvay din raat jio. day kann sunhu ardas jio. thok vajeay sabh ditheya tus apay layan chhaday jio. hun hukam hoa miharvan da. pai koay na kisai*

Halemi – Some Discussion

The key word in this paradigm propounded by Guru Arjan is *halemi* raj translated as rule through humility. The word *halemi* occurs in a couple of other places in Gurbani where again it has been translated as humility. In both cases - Guru Arjan using the metaphor of Muslim prayers¹² and by Guru Nanak in a farming metaphor¹³ the word has been used along with other virtues and its translation as humility fits in with the contexts.

Humility has been treated as a sublime virtue in Sikh thought. Guru Nanak placed realm of humility at the highest level that may be achieved by men in spiritual quest transition above which is possible only if God's grace descends on them. Termed *saram khand* it is the realm where forms of incomparable beauty are fashioned and intellect, understanding and intuitive consciousness is shaped. So is the consciousness of warriors for righteous causes and those spiritually perfect fashioned there.¹⁴ Thus viewed humility is associated with most highly

*ranjandaa. sabh sukhalee vutheea ih hoa halaymee raj jio. jhimm jhimm amrit varasdaa. bolaya bolee khasam da. baho man keea tuh upray too aapay paa-
ih theay jio. tayria bhagta bhukh sad tayreea. har locha pooran mayreea. dayh
daras sukhdaatia mai gal vich lailu milaey ji-o. tudh jayvad avar na bhalya.
too deep loa pa-i-aalia. too thaana thanantar rav rahya nanak bhagtaa sach
adhaar jio. ha-o gosai da pahilvanrha. mai gur mil uch dumarha. sabh hoe
chhinjh iktlee-aa dayu baitha vaykhai aap jio. vat vajan tamak bhayrya. mal
lathay laiday fayreea. nihay panj ju-aan mai gur thapee ditte kand jio. sabh
ikthay hoe aya. ghar jasan vaat vataya. gurmukh laha lai ga-ay manmukh
chalay mool gavaey jio. Too varna chihna bahra. har diseh hajar jahra. sun
sun tuihai hi-aa-iday tayray bhagat ratay guntas jio. mai jug jug da-yai
sayorhee. gur katee mihdee jayorhee. hao bahuurh chhinjh na nacheo nanak
osar ladha bhal jio - Sri Rag M V, p. 73.*

12. *aval sifai doojee saabooree. teejai halaymee cha-uthai khairree. punjvai panjay
ikat mukaamai ayhi panj vakhat tayray aparparaa - Maru M V, p. 1084.*
13. *bhao bhuay pavit paneer sat santokh balayd. hal halemi halee chit cheta vatar
vakhat sanjog - Ramkali M I, p. 955.*
14. *saram khand kee banee roop. tithai gharhat gharheei bahut anoop. — tithai
gharheei surat mat man buh. tithai gharheei suraa sidhaa kee sudh - Japji,
Pauri 36.*

developed consciousness where the person is in total and complete harmony with the creation with all its diversity and complexities.

Bhagat Namdev in his long hymn about the Sultan asking him to revive a dead cow or face death closes by saying [when the cow was revived by divine intervention] that the purpose of the miracle was that the king should walk on the path of truth and humility.¹⁵

My sense from the above is that the word *halemi* in the poem is intended to mean humility in a broader way to include all its related attributes.

Gursikh – Some Discussion

The word has been translated as Guru's Sikh. Its literal meaning is disciple of the Guru. To grasp its meaning let us look at another composition, where Guru Arjan has spoken thus of the feelings of a virtuous, searching, tormented soul when she sees a Sikh of the Guru: I bow to him in humility and fall at his feet. I tell to him of the pain tormenting my soul, and beg him to unite me with the Guru. I implore him to impart to me understanding that helps me control my wandering mind. I place my hopes in him and beseech him to show me the path to God to take my pain and suffering away!

[The Sikh says] by myself, I do not even know how to speak; I say as the Lord tells me to. Come my sister, abandon intellectual pursuits and forget love of duality; do what the Guru tells you to do. This way, you shall obtain vision of the Lord and hot winds shall not even touch you. Guru Nanak has been kind and compassionate to me. I am blessed with treasure of Lord's devotional worship and I shall never again feel hunger or thirst. I am satisfied, satiated and fulfilled and

15. *is patia ka ihai parvan. sach seel chalo sultan* -- Bhairon Namdev, p. 1166.

when I see a Sikh of the Guru, I humbly bow and fall at his feet.¹⁶

This seems to say that Gursikh draws inspiration from the Guru and can unite others with the divine. He fully accepts and lives by the divine teachings. In other words the term is intended to imply a pious person who could inspire others through his demonstrated sense of piety.

Dharamsal – Some Discussion

The word *dharamsal* in this poem has been translated in various texts as temple [of truth]. To me it seems that this interpretation may be rather restrictive. The context in the poem is of life and its larger challenge of striving to subdue cardinal vices and imbibing values that help in not having to dance in the wrestling arena of life again. This seems akin to *tis vich dharti thap rakhi dharmasal* concept of *dharma khand* in Japji, where the phrase *dharamasal* conveys the import of an arena for righteous action. I think this interpretation would fit in more with the totality of the concept propounded in the poem. In other words the vision envisages a society of people committed to virtuous values, brought together to live in peace and harmony who are conscious that their action choices have profound consequences not only in determining their ability to live together in harmony but also to achieve liberation.

16. *jo deesai gursikhrha tis niv niv lago paey jio. akha birtha jia kee gur sajan deh milaey jio. soi das updesrha mera man anat na kahoo jaey jio. ih man tai koon devsa mai marag deh bataey jio. ho aya dhoorahu chal ke mai takee to sarnaey jio. mai asa rakhee chit meh mera sabho dukh gavaey jio. it marag chale bhairhay gur kahai so kar kamaey jio. tiagen man kee matrhee visaren dooja bhao jio. iho pavahi har darsavarha nah lagai tatee vao jio. ho apnu bol na janda mai kahia sabh hukmao jio. har bhagat khajana bakhisia gur nanak kiya pasao jio. mai bahurh na tarisna bhukhrhee ho raja taripat aghaey jio. jo gur deesai sikhrha tis niv niv lago paey jio* - Suhi, M V, Gunvantee p. 763.

RELATING THE CONCEPT TO REALITY: THE EMERGING PARADIGM

To translate the sublime mystical thought into a mundane working concept is a hazardous task but attempt it we must to relate it to life as we know and the world we are living in. I therefore will proceed to do that in the light of what the poem says and my understanding of related Sikh thought.

The realm where such a society may exist is part of the world established by God in the midst of nights, days, weeks, seasons; wind, water, fire and nether regions, characterized as *dharamsal*, an abode for *dharam*. This setting is subject to immutable laws that bind the creation to go about its assigned duty in a detached manner. God has placed beings of diverse species and hues with various, infinite names and identities in this realm. This is arena for *dharma* and actions and deeds of the mortals while in this realm will, when they depart be scrutinized from their *dharmic* perspective in God's court.¹⁷

This *dharamsal* is rooted in truth i.e. truth is its *dharma* and its foundational principle. This *dharma* is lived through the practice of *nam, dan, isnan* - naam, charity and inner purity [also external cleanliness]. This triad commended by Guru Nanak¹⁸ continues to serve as a concise definition of Sikh ethos where freedom from cycle of transmigration is primarily achieved through the practice of *nam simran* or meditation on the divine Name, assisted by altruistic giving [*dan*] but essentially involving pure living [*isnan*]. All three precepts in thought as well in praxis underpin the concept of *seva* where the believers are persuaded to surrender themselves totally, body, mind and materials - *tan, man, dhan* - to the Guru and live per Guru's

17. *raati ruti thitee var, pawan pani agni patal, tis vich dharti thap rakhi dharamsal, tis vich jio jugat ke rang, tin ke nam anek anant, karmi karmi hoey veechar, sacha aap sacha darbar, tithe sohan panch parwan, nadar karam pave neesan, kach pakai uthe paye, Nanak geaya japai jaye* - [M I p.7].

18. *gurmukh nam dan isnan, gurmukh laagai sehj dheyan* - Ramkali M I, Sidh Ghost, p. 942.

teachings to achieve union with the Divine.¹⁹ The concept translates into *seva* in praxis as the acts like bringing water, waving fan indicate.

The 'truth' characteristic also suggests that the State and the rulers do not have skeletons hiding in their closets. The inner working of the administration is clean and trustworthy. There is no falsehood; there is no cheating, lying, deceiving, misleading, surveillance of or snooping into citizens' lives. The operating procedures are not oppressive, coercive or degrading of the dignity of the individual.

Those who wish to seek a leadership role to establish such a society must seek guidance from a mentor who should be a person of impeccable credentials. The mentor must have strong moral and ethical foundation and should be recognized by the people as worthy of mentoring [like the Guru]. The learner must give up all evil propensities and demonstrate his fitness by undergoing a rigorous test that should be in the open so that those who are part of this dispensation validate it and are satisfied with transparency of the scrutiny – like in a wrestling bout.

The leader or the ruler seeks out those who can make this realm a better place and tries to persuade them to come and be a part of it. He treats them with great respect and ensures that their needs and their comforts are taken care of [Gursikhs and their treatment]. These people become the pace setters, examples, role models as well as mentors for others to be better citizens.

Humility in dealing with the populace by the ruling elite defines the way such a State is governed. With this at the core of its governance policy regulation is accomplished only through persuasion and consensus using a participative mode. Implicitly it means that people are treated as sovereign [siblings of destiny] and the rulers see their role as facilitators for the people's

19. *tan man dhan sabh saunp gur ko hukam maniai paiai* – Ramkali Anand M III, p.918.

efforts to provide for themselves, enjoy their lives peacefully and follow their pursuits without hindrance. In this fraternal setting both sides recognize that their interests and pursuits are shared. All are treated equal as in *abchal nagar* where the 'stores are filled with intuitive peace and happiness and there is no tax on non-believers or any fines or levies at death'.²⁰

Humility is not to be read as a sign of weakness or lack of resolve. On the contrary it is only the strong that can really be humble without being servile or cringing. It is a choice of behavior, made and lived only through deep deliberation. Those so imbued are in fact real warriors who would stake everything for the righteous cause. This plays out in two ways. The State must recognize that discriminative or oppressive policies will not work a resolute minority if it has a righteous cause and also that this internal policy of the State should against not be read as weak leadership by those inimical to the State.

In this environment of peace and amity no one chases after or causes harm to anybody. There are no detractors, slanderers or hate mongers spreading divisive virus among people along religious, ethnic, caste or class lines or manipulating the political authority to achieve their personal ambitions. People feel secure; are not anxious or fearful and the societal environment is blissful promoting higher values and spiritual pursuits. All people are believers and even though they follow their respective paths they accept plurality and diversity inherent in creation and share basic ethical and moral values.

People enjoy their God given freedom to make choices. *Gurmukhs* remind them that birth as a human being is their unique opportunity to connect with the divine. In this endeavor the Guru and *gurmukh* always help, guide and bring encouragement to them. Those who progress spiritually grow into *gurmukhs*. Fellowship [*sangat*] helps for there is always so much to learn from one another as long as one develops the

20. *saant sahj sukh kay sabh haant, saah vaapaaree aykai that, jayjia dann ko laey na jagaat* – Asa M V, p. 430.

discriminating intellect to sift the right from the wrong or even not so right [*bibek budhi*]. The fellowship bond is akin to extension of family and friends – a strong and reinforcing link without being invasive, onerous or threatening.

All must live together as fellow citizens in this community as productive, responsible and contributing members taking care of their families. Temporal pursuits are essential part of their mundane lives and coexist with their spiritual quest. Their effort is to work hard and through honest endeavor support their familial needs and spare some for the needy.

There are those who may not live by the higher moral and ethical values and continually are guided by their own self will and self interest. They are *manmukhs* and will end up losing their chance to connect with the divine in this life. For them the cycle of birth and death will continue and they will surely be dancing in the wrestling arena of life again.

POEM – A MINI EPIC?

I think a discussion on this subject would not be complete without some comments on the structure of the poem that come to mind. The poem does not occupy a unique position on a stand alone basis that compositions like Japji, Anand, Sukhmani, Asa ki Var or some other anthologies in prescribed or popular liturgical use do. It also seems to have eluded to receive favor from *ragis* as a preferred hymn for *kirtan* [the only exception I know of is by Bhai Harbans Singh who too took the theme of *gurmukh laha lai gaye not halemi raj*]. I still have to hear a discourse on the subject from our *kathakars*. At the same time I apprehend an intriguing fascination that the composition evokes – somewhat akin to the feeling that one gets at reading an epic poem or a mega narrative. For a hymn it is not very short. Its twenty-one stanzas place it well beyond the mode of four or less.

The poem tells a story within the larger story of life of the eternal struggle between good and evil. The struggle plays out in the open with the drums beating, the bugles sounding

and the rivals dressed up in colorful, heroic attires. The audience is large and diverse – almost the entire creation, good, bad, high, low, believers, non-believers et al. Even God deigns to witness the bout and descends to join those in the arena. The warrior on the good side is weak, even puny, but has the blessing and miraculous spiritual power of the holy preceptor as support in this fight against the strong, burly, intimidating evil foes. Their respective attributes are clear, defined and unchanging with no room for doubt about their position in the ethical and moral realm. The presentation is lyrical, the story and its moral message unfolding in the middle as we go back and forth in the mystic of the narrative. It has an idealistic vision that nurtures the hope that the transcendent God is with us and supportive of our efforts at bringing order and equity in the society if we cleanse our individual selves and move collectively forward with a spirit of service.

Once again the victory belongs to the virtuous – but a couple of features stand out. Firstly this battle is played out within and therefore there are no gory scenes; no blood letting; no loss of the innocent lives; no wide spread suffering; no degrading episodes; no collateral damage. It spares the grand struggle from becoming an all-consuming societal strife. The message comes through strong and clear but in a humane way.

The next difference to me is how the victor savors his victory. He is happy. He feels blessed but he is not content with just being the victor. This victory must have a higher purpose. His happiness inspires in him the ideal of creating a society where the ruling elite and societal leadership come forward to lead with humility and modesty - through *seva*. What a way to savor victory!

To me the poem seems to presage the story of the sage whose intensity of love divine is so strong that he is no more afraid. Imbued only with spirit of love and *seva* he has this consuming commitment to deliver the promise of bringing love to all. He has a strong and abiding belief in an open

fraternity where none is inimical or stranger to the other and all live in harmony.²¹ A savior who will give up anything, even make the supreme sacrifice if that is the way God causes it to play out for his beliefs and values. This poem, in the manner of an epic, seems to foreshadow the grand finale of the Guru going through those inhuman, unbearable tortures that eventually followed to test the validity of strength of good over evil with blissful fortitude; with not a shadow of doubt, complaint or rancor in his demeanor; only words expressing tranquil acceptance of divine will on his silent lips '*tera bhana meetha laagey, har naam padarath nanak mangey*'.²²

It is the story of the *sevak* of the Lord who is eternal like his Master. It is no small tale. Let us bow in homage to this great *sevak* Guru – truly divine in human form!

21. *neh ko bairee nahe baigana sagal sang hum ko ban aaiey* – Kanra M V, p. 1299.

22. Asa M V, p. 394

MILITANT OR COMPASSIONATELY RESOLUTE? EXPLORING CULTURE OF RESISTANCE IN SIKH THOUGHT

OVERVIEW

Culture carries the connotation of customary beliefs, social forms and material traits of a racial, religious or social group. It consists of passing on values, norms, institutions and artifacts from generation to generation. To resist means to oppose aggression, withstand force and its effects. Resistance is the power or capacity to resist and the term has been variously used to describe opposition to an invasion, foreign occupation, response to tyranny and injustice and acts to attain social or political change.

Militancy implies being aggressively active in a cause; tending to or exhibiting aggression marked by combative readiness. Compassion is sympathetic feeling and resolute stands for firmly determined, steadfast, staunch, faithful, true.

In this paper we will attempt to look at the way consciousness about resistance may have been raised in Sikh thought to try and help us find an answer to our subject question. To comprehend the precepts that may guide Sikh inspiration and understanding and mould their societal behavior we will look at the broad parameters of Sikh thought on human destiny followed by some specific encounters and responses evinced from the writings and lives of the Gurus.

RELATED HISTORICAL CONTEXT: GURU PERIOD

Guru Nanak lived through the Lodhi period till Babar overthrew them in 1526. Behlol Lodhi governed with a firm hand and died in 1488 after a prosperous reign of thirty-eight years. Sikandar Lodhi was intolerant towards Hindus, destroyed temples and prohibited the shaving by barbers of beards and heads of Hindus on occasion's pilgrimages. He died in 1517. Ibrahim Lodhi was known for acts of cruelty and was not liked. During his time Babar invaded Punjab twice in 1519, again in 1520 when he captured Sialkot and Saidpur and yet again in 1524 when he eventually marched into Lahore. At the urging of Daulat Khan Lodhi who was Governor of Punjab Babar invaded again in 1526. Ibrahim Lodhi was slain on the field and Babar established the Mughal rule.

Babar died in 1530. Humayun, who succeeded him waged wars on the Hindu kings of Bundelkhand and marched against Gujarat. While he was engaged in Gujarat, Sher Khan Suri gathered strength and in a battle in 1540 Humayun was defeated. He eventually fled and gave up the idea of re-establishing the Mughal Empire in India.

Sher Shah died in 1545 and in 5 years of effective rule introduced certain administrative systems that have survived till to day. Salem Shah who succeeded him, died in 1553 after an uneventful reign. Sikandar Shah assumed the royal title in the Punjab. Around this time friends of Humayun wrote to him from Agra and Delhi inviting him to return and take possession of the country. He was successful and re-entered Delhi in July 1555 but died on January 21st, 1556, by accidentally slipping on a marble pavement. Akbar was a born statesman and soldier though he had never even learnt to read or write. He possessed an inquisitive mind, delighted in Indian fables and encouraged arts. He ignored distinctions of race and creed and tried to start an inclusive tolerant faith that had some resonance with the teachings of Sikh Gurus. He died in October 1605, after a reign of fifty-one years. This period saw consolidation of the nascent Sikh tradition under the guidance

of Gurus Angad, Amar Das, Ram Das and Arjan.

Jahangir (1605–27) came to power with the support of orthodox Ulemmas and started out by promoting conversions to Islam, persecution of Jainas and execution of Guru Arjan. He soon got over his zeal but Shah Jahan (1628–58) picked up the thread again and for most of his reign Guru Hargobind had to contend with armed attempts to suppress Sikhs. Besides this Shah Jahan's campaigns and extravagant architectural indulgence drained the imperial treasury and there was wide spread discontent among peasants impoverished by heavy taxes.

Aurangzeb was austere and orthodox. He prohibited the use of wine, abolished singing and dancing and imposed Sharia law through harsh enforcement of strict edicts. He also issued an edict prohibiting Hindus from being carried in palanquins and riding on Arab horses and encouraged their forced conversions. His reign was a calamitous period for Sikhs with martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur and several armed confrontations during the period of Guru Gobind Singh. Aurangzeb died in 1707.

BROAD FRAME OF SIKH PRECEPTS

Sikh thought is founded on the premise that you must live your life in the real world as a responsible householder who copes with the alluring as well as grim realities of human existence. The highest spiritual goal that a Sikh aspires to is to connect with the Divine in this, the only lifetime, possible through living a prayerful, virtuous, altruistic and activist life. For a Sikh renunciation, withdrawal, celibacy, ritualism and austerities are non-options. Sikh thought therefore keeps on prodding the believers to look at problems that may confront pursuit of virtuous living and comments on the desiderata for social order, though dispersed are clear and direct.

Equality is an important plank of Sikh thought on social order. Sikhs do not seek equality the way economic or political theorists may do. They believe that some inequalities and differences are inherent in the Divine dispensation but we

must not cultivate an attitude of superciliousness and treat others as inferior because they are under privileged, women, poor et al. Men are asked to look for the Divine light in others, not their under privileged caste because distinctions of caste do not exist in God's court¹. On the status of women, the Guru questions how can we speak ill of women who mother all the upholders of our social order (leaders/kings)²? The poor must be looked after for those who feed off their labor cannot claim clear conscious³. To usurp what rightfully belongs to some one else is sinful for all⁴. In fact virtuous is the life of those who earn their livelihood through their effort and share what they have.⁵

Those in leadership role must be held accountable. Their decisions must be made after thorough deliberation and should be able to withstand moral scrutiny and tests for justice and being equitable. Those who rule must be seen to be just⁶ and in control of their evil propensities.⁷

Sikhs therefore expect each one to be able to enjoy the gift of life and carve their own destiny. They want to achieve it without violence or intimidation and shunning revenge almost in the manner of turning the other cheek and not causing pain to any one⁸. At the same time they pray for the boon not to shy away from righteous action — to be determined to right the wrongs, fight to win.⁹ To tread the path of Lord's love

1. *jaano jot neh poochho jaati aagey jaat neh hai* (M I p.349).

2. *so kiyon manda aakhiye jit jamme raajan* – (Asa M I, p. 473).

3. *jo rat peevay maansaa tin kiyon nirmal cheet* (M I p.140).

4. *haq paraaya Nanakaa us soor us gaay* (M I p. 141).

5. *ghaal khayee kichh hathoon dei, Nanak raah pachhane seh* (M I p.1245).

6. *raaje chuli niyaon kee* (M I p.1240).

7. *raajaa takht tikey ginee bhai panchain ratu* (M I p.992).

8. *Farida je tu maaran mukhiyan tina naa maare ghum, aapane ghar jaaiye paer tina dey chum— Je tu priya di sik heeo na thhaey kahi daa*(Slok Farid p.1384).

9. *de shiva bar mohey shubh karman te kabhoon neh taroon — nishchai he apni jeet karoon* (Dasam Granth, p. 240).

they must be prepared to give up life without demur¹⁰ for giving up life for a worthy cause is approved.¹¹

GURUS' IN PRESENCE OF THE DIVINE

Gurus have in their compositions mentioned about their experience of being in the Divine presence. We would reproduce verses by Gurus Nanak, Arjan and Gobind Singh to get an insight into their respective vision and divine message they received.

Nanak's Mission

Guru Nanak gives an account of his being summoned to the Divine presence and the command that he was given saying, 'I was a minstrel, out of work, when the Lord took me into His service. My Master summoned me His minstrel, to the true mansion of His presence. He commanded me to sing His praises day and night and clothed me in the robes of His true praise and glory. Now *amrit* of the True name has become food that sustains me and those who imbibe Guru's teachings will achieve satisfaction and find peace. His minstrel spreads His glory, singing and vibrating His word. Praising the true Lord, Nanak has obtained His fulfillment.'¹²

Arjan's Mission

Guru Arjan writes this epistle of love and humility 'I am a minstrel singing glorious praises of Har Prabh at His door to please Him. While others come and go my Prabh is permanent and stable. I beg Lord of the world to bless His minstrel with the gift of His glimpse, a gift that will fulfill him and satisfy

10. *jo to prem khelan kaa chhao sir dhar tali gali moree aao* (M I p.1412).

11. *maran neh mandaa lokaa aakhiyeje koi mar jaaney* (M I p.579).

12. *ho dtaadtee vaekaar kaarai laaeiaa raath dhihai kai vaar dhhurahu furamaaeiaa dtaadtee sachai mehal khasam bulaeiaa sachee sifath saalaah kaparraa paeiaa sachaa anmrith naam bhojan aneina guramathee khaadhhaa raj thin sukh paeina dtaadtee karae pasao sabadh vajaeiaa naanak sach saalaahi pooraa paeiaa* - Majh M I, p. 150.

his hunger. The beneficent Prabh heard the prayer, and summoned me, His minstrel to His presence. Gazing upon Prabh, I am rid of pain and hunger and do not think to ask for anything else. All desires fulfilled, I touch His feet. I am an humble, unworthy minstrel and Prabh has forgiven me.¹³

Gobind Singh's Mission

Guru Gobind Singh recounts his conversation with the Divine saying 'When I was busy in the austere devotion, the Lord called me and sent me to this world with the following words – CHAUPAI – "I have adopted you as my son and created you for the propagation of the Panth. Go therefore and spread Dharma and cause people to refrain from evil actions" – DOHRA - I stood up with folded hands and bowing down my head, said: "The Panth shall prevail in the world only with Thy assistance." – CHAUPAI - Lord has sent me and for this reason I was born in this world. Whatever the Lord said, I am repeating the same unto you; I do not bear enmity with anyone.'¹⁴ He goes on to say 'I have been sent into this world by Gurdev to propagate Dharma. He asked me to spread Dharma and vanquish the tyrants and evil-minded persons. All those seeking the Divine should know that I have taken birth for the purpose of promoting Dharma, protecting the saintly and rooting out tyrants and evil-minded persons. All the earlier incarnations

13. *ho dtaadtee dhar gun gaavadhaa jae har prabh bhaavai prabh maeraa thhir thhaavaree hor aavai jaavai so mangaa dhaan guosaaeeaa jith bhukh lehi jaavai prabh jeeo dhaevahu dharasan aapanaa jith dtaadtee thripathaavai aradhaas sunee dhaathaar prabh dtaadtee ko mehal bulaavai prabh dhaekhadhiaa dhukh bhukh gee dtaadtee ko mangan chith n aavai sabhae eishhaa pooreeaa lag prabh kai paavai ho niragun dtaadtee bakhasioun prabh purakh vaedhaavai* – Maru M V, p. 1097

14. *Tap saadhat Har(i) moh(i) bulaayo Im kah(i) kai eh lok pathaayo — Mai apnaa sut tohe nivaajaa Panth prachur karbe kauh saajaa Jaah(i) tahaan tai dharam(u) chalaee Kabudh(i) karan te lok hataae — thaah bhayo mai jor(i) kar bachan kahaasir niaae Panth chalai tab jagat mai jab tum karoh sahaae — Ih karan(i) Prabh moh(i) pathaayo Tab mai jagat janam dhar(i) aayo Jim tin kahoo tinai tijn kahihon Aur kisoo te bair na gahihon* – Bachitar Natak, p. 136-7.

caused only their names to be remembered. They did not strike the tyrants and did not make them follow the path of Dharma.¹⁵

EVENTS & RESPONSES BY GURUS

Gurus' lives and compositions provide an extensive glimpse of their sensitivity to the problems that confronted society they lived in and their responses to certain events and occurrences. We will look at a few of these to sample their perceptions and their moral message.

NANAK [1469-1539]

Ills of Ruling Elite

The ills of rulers and officials find frequent mention in Nanak's utterances, example 'the kings are tigers, and their officials are dogs; they intrude on people in their sleep to harass them and as their minions inflict wounds with their nails and the dogs - higher officials - lick up the blood that is spilled. Remember that in His court, all beings will be judged and those who have violated the people's trust will be disgraced; their noses will be cut off.'¹⁶

Alien Cultural Influences

Nanak points to decay in the moral moorings of the society and the emerging influence on culture, language and religious freedom from the discriminatory practices by Muslim

-
15. *Ham eh kaaj jagat mo aae Dharam het Gurdev pathaae Jahaan tahaan tum dharam bithaaro Dust dokheean(i) pakar(i) pachhaaro Yaahoo kaaj dharaa ham janamang Samajh leh(u) saadhoo sabh man mang Dharam chalaavan sant ubaaran Dust sabhan ko mool upaaran Je je bhae pahil avtaaraa aap(u) aap(u) tin jaap(u) uchaaraa Prabh dokhoo kooo na bidaaraa Dharam karan ko raahi(u) na'aaraa - Dasam Granth p. 138.*
 16. *raajae seeh mukadham kuthae jae jagaeinih baithae suthae chaakar nehadhaa paeinih ghaao rath pithi kuthiho chatt jaahu jithhai jeeaan hosee saar nakanaee vadtanaee laaeithabaar -- Malar M I, p. 1288.*

dispensation saying 'This earth is Your cooking pot and Your beings receive their portions only once per their destiny. But not satisfied they beg for more and their fickle mind brings them disgrace — Now that the turn of Sheikhs has come this is what it has brought. Temples of gods are being subjected to taxes and the Primal Being is addressed as Allah. Muslim devotional pots, calls to prayer, prayers and prayer mats are everywhere and even Banwari is clad in blue robes. People in every home use Muslim greetings and even their speech has changed.'¹⁷

Brahmin Hypocrisy

In this setting hypocrisy of Brahmins can only be exacerbating: 'while wearing sacred marks on their foreheads and saffron loincloths around their waists they carry knives in their hands - they are butchers of the world! They wear blue robes to be approvingly seen by Muslim rulers, accept bread from them yet worship the Puraanas. They eat goat meat killed after Muslim prayers are read over them but at home they still do not allow anyone else to enter their kitchens.'¹⁸

Babar Vani

In his compositions popularly known as 'Babar Vani' Nanak has commented on various factors reflective of the state of society, its erosion of moral values and the widespread suffering that befell people as Babar's forces attacked the country then ruled by Afghan Lodhi kings. A look at these compositions

17. *dhharathee dhaeg milai eik vaeraa bhaag thaeraa bha(n)ddaaree naa saaboar hovai fir ma(n)gai naaradh karae kluuaaree lab adhhaeraa ba(n)dheekhaanaa aougan pair — aadh purakh ko alahu kehecai saekhaa(n) aae vaaree dhaeval dhaevathiaa kar laagaa aisee keerath chaalee koojaa baa(n)g nivaaj musalaa neel roop banavaaree ghar ghar meea sabhanaa(n) jeeaaa(n) bole avar thumaaree - Basant Hindol, M I, p.1191.*

18. *mathai tikaa tayrh Dhotee kakhaa-ee.hath chhuree jagat kaasaa-ee. neel vastar pahir hoveh parvaan.malaychi Dhaan lay poojeh puraan.abhaakli-aa kaa kuthaa bakraa khaanaa.cha-ukay upar kisai na jaanaa - M I p.471-2.*

would add to our understanding of Nanak's sensitivity, his empathy and the sense that he makes of the cataclysmic events in the lives of innocent people and as symbolic of divine dispensation.

In Asa, he says, 'having brought Khurasan under His protection God dispatched terror to Hindustan. The Creator sent the Mugal as messenger of death Himself but does not take the blame. When there was so much slaughter that people screamed, did You not feel any compassion? You are the Master of all, O Creator Lord. If the powerful strike out against powerful, then it may not cause grief to any one. But if a ravenous tiger attacks a flock of sheep and kills them, then its master must answer. This priceless country has been laid to waste and defiled by dogs. No one will cherish the dead when they are gone. You unite, and You Yourself separate; I gaze upon Your glorious greatness. One may assume a great name, and revel in the pleasures of the mind, but in the eyes of the Lord and Master, he is just a worm, for all the corn that he eats. Only one who dies to his ego while yet alive, obtains the blessings, O Nanak, by chanting the Lord's Name."¹⁹ This verse is considered by historians to relate to Babar's first invasion about which Babar recognized excesses by his soldiers in his memoirs.

In Tilang he says, "As the word of the forgiving Lord comes to me, so do I express it, O Lalo. Babar has invaded from Kabul bringing the marriage party of sin and demanding our land as his wedding gift. Modesty and righteousness have vanished, and falsehood struts around like a leader. Satan

19. *khuraasaan khasamaanaa keeaa hi(n)dhysathan ddarqaeiaa aapai dhos n dhaeee karathaa jam kar mugal charraaeiaa eaethee maar pee karalaanae thai(n) kee dharadh n aeiaa karathaa thoo(n) sabhanaa kaa soee jae sakathaa sakathae ko maarae thaa man ros n hoee sakathaa seehu maarae pai vagai khasamai saa purasaee rathan vigaarr vigoae kutha(n)ae mueiaa saar n kaee aapae jorr vishhorrae aapae vaekh thaeree vaddiaee jae ko naao dhharanaee vaddaa saadh karae man bhaanae khasamai nadharee keerraa aavai jaethae chugai dhaanae mar mar jeevai thaa kishh paeae naanak naam vakhaanae - Asa M I, p. 360.*

conducts the marriage rites as Qazis and the Brahmins have lost their roles. Muslim women read the Koran and in their misery chant Khhuda. So do the Hindu women, both of high social status and lowly — The One who created and attached the mortals to pleasures, sits alone, and watches on. True is the Master and true is His justice. He issues His commands as He deems just.”²⁰

Guru Nanak was an eyewitness to the conflict at Eminabad and has vividly described the excesses of Babar’s soldiers, during his third invasion; in Asa he laments, “heads that were adorned with braided hair, with their parts painted with vermilion were shaved with scissors, and their throats choked with dust. — When they were married, their husbands looked so handsome beside them. They came in palanquins, decorated with ivory; water was sprinkled over their heads, and glittering fans were waved above them. They were given hundreds of thousands of coins when they sat, and hundreds of thousands of coins when they stood. They ate coconuts and dates, and rested comfortably upon their beds. But ropes were put around their necks, and their strings of pearls were broken. Their wealth and youthful beauty, which gave them so much pleasure, have now become their enemies. The order was given to the soldiers, who dishonored them, and carried them away. If it is pleasing to God’s Will, He bestows greatness; if it pleases His Will, He bestows punishment. If someone focuses on the Lord beforehand, then why should he be punished? The kings had lost their higher consciousness, reveling in pleasure and sensuality. — Whatever pleases Him, comes to pass. O Nanak,

20. *jaisē mai aavai khasam kē baanē thaisarraa karee, gīaṇ vae laalo paap kē ja(n)n(j) lai kaabalahu dhlhaaeiaa joree ma(n)gai dhaan vae laalo saram dhharam dhlue shhap khaloeae koorr firai paradhhaan vae laalo kaajeena baamanaa kē gal thhakee agadh parrai saithaan vae laalo musalamaaneēaa parrehi kathaebaa kasatt mehī karehi khudhae vae laalo jaath sanaathee hor hidhavaaneēaa eaehi bhee laekhai laae vae laalo — jin oupaaee ra(n)g ravaaee bait(h)aa vaekhai vakh eikaelaa sachaa so saahib sach thapaavas sacharraa nīaao karaeg masolaa* — Tilang M I, p. 722.

what is the fate of mankind?"²¹

Continuing in Asa he questions, "Where are the games, the stables, and the horses? Where are the drums and the bugles? Where are the sword-belts and chariots? Where are those scarlet uniforms? Where are the rings and the beautiful faces? They are no longer to be seen here. This world is Yours; You are the Lord of the Universe. In an instant, You establish and disestablish. You distribute wealth as it pleases You. Where are the houses, the gates, the hotels and palaces? Where are those beautiful way stations? Where are those beautiful women, reclining on their beds, whose beauty would not allow one to sleep? Where are those betel leaves, their sellers, and the harem? They have vanished like shadows. For the sake of this wealth, so many were ruined; because of this wealth, so many have been disgraced. It was not gathered without sin, and it does not go along with the dead. Those, whom the Creator Lord would destroy - first He strips them of virtue, Millions of religious leaders failed to halt the invader, when they heard of the Emperor's invasion. He burned the rest houses and the ancient temples; he cut the princes limb from limb, and cast them into dust. None of the Mughals went blind, and no one performed any miracle. The battle raged between the Mughals and the Pathaans, and the swords clashed on the battlefield. They took aim and fired their guns, and they attacked with their elephants. Men whose letters were torn in the Lord's Court were destined to die, O Siblings of Destiny. The women - Hindu, Muslim, Bhattis and Rajputs -

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21. *jin sir sohan patteeaa maa(n)gee paae sa(n)dhhooor sae sir kaanthee mu(n)neeanih gal vich aavai dhhoorr -- jadhahu seeaa veeaaheeeaa laarrae sohan paas heeddolee charr aaeaa dha(n)dh kha(n)dd keethae raas ouparahu paanee vaareei jhalae jhimakan paas eik lakh lehanih behit(h)eeaa lakh lehanih khaarreeaa garee shluhaarae khaa(n)dheeeaa maananih saejarreeaa thinh gal silakaa paaeeaa thuttanih mothasareeeaa dhan joban dhue vairee hoeae jinhee rakhae ra(n)g laae dhoothaa no furamaaeiaa lai chalaе path gavaae jae this bhaavai dhaе vaddiaae jae bhaavai dhaе sajaae ago dhaе jae chaetheeai thaa(n) kaeeth milai sajaae saahaa(n) surath gavaaeaa ra(n)g thamaasai — jo this bhaavai so thheeai naanak kica maanukh - Asa M I, p. 417.*

some had their robes torn away, from head to foot, while others came to dwell in the cremation ground. Their husbands did not return home - how did they pass their night? The Creator Himself acts, and causes others to act. Unto whom should we complain? Pleasure and pain come by Your Will; unto whom should we go and cry? The Commander issues His Command, and is pleased. O Nanak, we receive what is written in our destiny."²²

Clearly Guru Nanak in all his utterances above is raising our consciousness about ills of the society: We must be watchful of corrupt and capricious governance. People's trust must not be allowed to be violated. We should have pride in our identity and our heritage and not get subsumed by the dominant cultural environment. This does not imply that we shun the other. On the contrary we must pull together if an avaricious foreign force wants to subdue us for when they violate our women they may not distinguish between Hindu and Muslim, Rajput or Bhatti.

Nanak's empathy with the poor, suffering innocent men and women comes out strongly. When the powerful fall upon

22. *kehā s khael thabaelā ghorrae kehā bhaeree sehanaaee kehā s thaegaba(n)dh gaaddaerarr kehā s laal kavāaee kehā s aaraseea muh ba(n)kae aithhai dhiseli naahee eihu jag thaeraa thoo gosaaee eaek gharree mehi thhaap outhhaapae jar va(n)dd dhaevai bhaa(n)ee kehā(n) s ghar dhar ma(n)ddap mehalā kehā s ba(n)k saraaee kehā(n) s saej sukhaalee kaaman jis vaekh needh n paaee kehā s paan tha(n)bole haramaa hoeaa shlaaee maaee eis jar kaaran ghanee viguthee ein jar ghanee khuaaee paapaa baajhahu hovai naahee mueiaa saathh n jaaee jis no aap khuaaene karathaa khus leae cha(n)giaaee kottee hoo peer varaj rehāaee jaa meer suniaa dhhaaeiaa thhaan mukaam jalae bij ma(n)dhar mushh mushh kueir rulaaeiaa koe mugāl n hoaa a(n)dhhaa kinai n parachaa laaeiaa mugāl pat(h)anaa bhee larraaee ran mehi thaeg vāgaee ounhee thupak thaān chalaee ounhee hasath chirraee jinh kee cheeree dharageh paattee thinhaa maranaa bhaaē eik hi(n)dhavaanee avar thurakaanee bhattiaanee t(h)akuraanee eikanhaa paeran sir khur paattaa eikanhaa vaas masaanee jinh kae ba(n)kae gharee n aaeiaa thinh kio rain vihaanee aapae karae karaaene karathaa kis no aakh sunaaeeai dhukh sukh thaerai bhaanai hovai kis thhai jae rooaeeai hukamee hukam chalaeeai vigasai naanak likhiaa paaeeai – Asa M I, p. 417.*

and kill the weak their master must be held to answer. He is condemnatory of greed and pleasure seeking ways of people and deprecates strongly the loss of higher consciousness by the ruling elite and their failure to protect the country. It must not escape our attention that Nanak has ridiculed the attempt to cast spells on and fight the invading Babar by using miracles. He says 'religious leaders failed to halt the invader — none of the Mughals went blind and no one performed any miracle.' He also seems to be pointing to the Lodhi military response when he says 'they [Mughals] took aim and fired their guns, and they [Pathaans] attacked with their elephants.' Fighting guns with elephants could only be indicative of inaptness. The message that one reads is that if you suffer an armed attack you must defend with all your strength and in a manner to match the invader. Protection of people is your responsibility. You cannot and must not shirk it.

Let us now try to understand the import of the other message that Nanak is conveying. In all the verses the Guru's unwavering belief in supremacy of and his humble acceptance of divine will is evident. In that light he characterises Mughals to have been sent by God to punish Lodhis and the people for their fall. At the same time he likens those punishing to a bridal party of sinners who indulge in rape and ravine. Where can then one go — God who attached mortals to all these allurements, sits alone and watches on? Even though he seems to chide God for not showing compassion when the suffering screamed in pain, the answer is obvious — it is for humans to resist all that may ail the society individually and collectively. Hypocrisy and naiveté is no help. Mere self-image and vain visions of power are meaningless for in the eyes of God the mighty are no more than mere worms. To not invite the wrath of God people must rise above temptation and motivate others to do so.

On how to become fearless Nanak says 'It all worked out-I was saved. Haumai within me was subdued and my evil instincts have become my servants since I placed my faith in

the True Guru. By the grace of the True, carefree Lord I have renounced my useless schemes. Listen my mind; fear departs only when you meet with the True One. How can one become fearless without the fear of God? Become Gurmukh, and immerse yourself in the Shabad.²³ Having fear of God, total submission, enables the love of divine to well up within and connect with God. Once that state is reached fears will depart from within.

ANGAD THROUGH RAM DAS [1539-52-74-81]

Humayun defeated by Sher Shah was on retreat when he stopped at Khadur to seek Guru Angad's blessings. When Humayan arrived the Guru and the congregation was absorbed in singing devotional hymns. After a while Humayan became impatient and put his hand on the hilt of his sword. The Guru looked up just at that moment, noticed his move and said, "When it was time for you to use the sword you failed to but you do not hesitate to intimidate unarmed devotees engaged in prayer."

Akbar paid a visit to Goindwal on his way to Lahore to meet Guru Amar Das at. He was informed that he could see the Guru only after he had dined with the sangat in the Guru's langar. It is said that Akbar partook of the food and then met with the Guru.

Guru Ram Das brought greater clarity to emerging Sikh identity. He brought definition to Sikh wedding liturgy and laid the foundation of what in course of time developed into Sikh code of conduct. He also unambiguously resolved some of the traditional negative thoughts about material things and economic activity and spiritual pursuit and sanctified material possessions as pure and blessed if the means used to achieve them were fair; the owner is virtuous and their use is for altruistic purposes.

23. *bhalee saree j oubaree houmai muee gharaahu dhooth lagae fir chaakaree sathigur kaa vaesaahu kalap thiaagee baadh hai sachaa vaeparavaahu man rae sach milai bho jaae bhai bin nirabho kio thheesai guramukh sabadh samaae - Sri Rag M I, p. 18.*

The message remains – use the sword to fight aggression for that is your duty, not to intimidate or oppress the weak and stay resolute to define and defend your principles.

ARJAN [1581-1606]

By Arjan's time the following of the Gurus was growing in places as far apart as Kabul and Dacca. Increasing number of Hindus and even some Muslims had been gravitating to Guru's discipleship. This caused uneasiness among some Pandits and Qazis. Towards the end of Akbar's rule certain influential Muslim clerics like Shaikh Ahmed Sirhindi started advocating control of spread of Sikhi before it became a threat to Islam.

Successive Gurus had been confronted with internal dissent from family members who felt they had a claim to the Ministry and challenged each succession even though it was per the choice of the preceding Guru. This divide had not only created sects or parallel movements but also degenerated into a personal vendetta against the Guru in the time of Arjan.

The confluence of these adverse factors impacted the safety and security of the person of the Guru. He was conscious of this and his compositions refer to attacks intended to bring harm to him. His compositions also show focus on internal purity to enable one to initiate societal transformation. It is this steeling of self that no doubt gave him the courage and resolve to bear torture preceding his martyrdom with equanimity.

Halemi Raj

Guru Arjan has alluded to a vision of *halemi raj* – a concept of benevolent, humble and modest rule. We have discussed it in some detail elsewhere in this book. This vision is unique in the way it defines the assets of leadership, extols service as the core attribute of a leader, envisages exemplars and role models as catalysts for societal transformation and commend transparency and accountability in governance – related in the form of a mini epic with all its spiritual, heroic and humane nuances.

False Complaint Regarding Granth

A Brahman Mullans made a complaint against the Guru in 1598 to Emperor Akbar who that the Granth under compilation had verses derogatory to Muslims and Hindus. The Guru sent Baba Budha and Bhai Gurdas with the volume under compilation to answer any questions. Akbar was satisfied and the complaint was dismissed. The Guru writes that 'the memorandum against me has proved false and the slanderers have come to grievous loss. Yama does not touch him whose has the support of Govind. The blind one who utters falsehood in True court has to beat his head and writhe his hands (in remorse). Prabh himself sits in judgment and those who sin are afflicted by ailments. All are bound by their own actions and riches are of no avail when life departs. Nanak sought sanctuary of His true court and his honor was saved by the Creator.'²⁴

Attack on his Life

As the story goes, Sulahi Khan was a Mughal courtier. Prithi Chand, Arjan's disaffected brother invited him and both conspired to finish the Guru off. While showing him round, however Sulahi's horse stepped over a burning kiln that gave way and he was roasted alive. Guru Arjan who referred this incident at a few places in his verses writes 'first I was counseled to send a letter, secondly I was advised to send two men to mediate. Third was the advice to make the effort and do something. I have renounced everything, and I meditate only on You, Prabh. Now, I am totally blissful, carefree and at

24. *mehajar jhoot(h)aa keethon aap paapee ko laagaa sa(n)thaap jisehi sehaanee gobidh 'maeraa this ko jam nehee aavai naeraa saachee dharageh bolai koor sir haanhh pashhorrai a(n)dhaa moor rog biaapae karadhae paap adhalee hoe bait(h)aa prabh aap apan kamaaeiai aapae baadhhae dharab gaeiaa sabh jea kai saathhai naanak saran parae dharabaar raakhee paij maera karathaar – Gauri M V, p. 199.*

ease. Enemies and evildoers have perished, and I have obtained peace.'²⁵

At another places, Guru Arjan writes: 'God preserved me from Sulhi, (his attack). Sulhi did not succeed in his plot, and he died in disgrace. God drew forth His axe and smote off his head and in a moment he was reduced to ashes. Plotting and planning evil, he was destroyed. He who created him thrust him into the fire. Of his sons, friends and wealth, nothing remains; his brethren and relations have all abandoned him. Says Nanak, I am sacrifice to that Prabh who fulfilled the prayer uttered by His servant.'²⁶

Martyrdom of Arjan

We have also mentioned earlier about martyrdom of the Guru. He was the first Sikh Guru martyr. Jahangir has recorded in Tuzk i Jahangiri that '— a Hindu named Arjan — [who] had captured many simple-hearted Hindus and even ignorant and foolish Muslims — when Khusro passed this way — [he] made a finger-mark of saffron on his forehead that the Indians call Qashqa and is considered propitious. When this came to my ears and I fully knew his heresies, I ordered that he should be brought into my presence and having handed over his houses, dwelling places, and children to Murtaza Khan and having confiscated his property I ordered that he should be put to death with tortures.'

Tradition has it that Jahangir ordered the Guru to pay a fine of two hundred thousand rupees and also to erase hymns

25. *dutee-ay mataa du-ay maanukh pahuchaava-o. taritee-ay mataa kichh kara-o upaa-i-aa. mai sabh kichh chhod parabh tuhee Dlii-aa-i-aa. mahaa anand achint sehjaa-i-aa. dusman doot mu-ay sukh paa-i-aa - Asa M V, p. 371.*

26. *sulehee thae naaraaein raakh sulehee kaa haathh kehee n pahuchai sulehee hoe mooaa naapaak kaadt kut(h)aar khasam sir kaattiaa khiin mehi hoe gaeiaa hai khaak ma(n)dhaa chithavath chithavath pachiaa jin rachiaa thin dheenaa dhihaak puthr meeth dhlan kishhoo n rehiou s shihodd gaeiaa sabh bhaaee saak kahu naanak this prabh balihaaree jin jan kaa keeno pooran vaak - Bilawal M V, p. 825.*

in the Granth that were opposed to the Hindu and Muslim faiths. The Guru replied that any money he had was for the poor and if Jahangir wanted he could have it but not by way of fine. As regards the Granth, he said that it had nothing that is derogatory; besides he could not erase or alter a word of it.

The sentence was carried out. The Guru went through those inhuman, unbearable tortures' that eventually followed to test the validity of strength of good over evil with blissful fortitude; with not a shadow of doubt, complaint or rancor in his demeanor; only words expressing tranquil acceptance of divine will on his silent lips '*tera bhana meetha laagey, har naam padarath nanak mangey.*'²⁷

Let us now try and comprehend the message emanating from the above narratives. Ideal of societal transformation in *halemi raj* is founded on the individual struggle of a person to fight and win over evil propensities. This battle is played out within and therefore there are no gory scenes; no bloodletting; no wide spread suffering; no degrading episodes; no loss of the innocent lives and no collateral damage. The victor is happy and his happiness inspires in him the ideal of creating a society where the societal leadership comes forward to lead with humility and modesty - through seva.

Humility is not to be read as a sign of weakness or lack of resolve. On the contrary it is only the strong that can really be humble without being servile or cringing. It is a choice of behavior, made and lived only through deep deliberation. Those so imbued are in fact real warriors who would stake everything for the righteous cause. This sets new markers for individuals in pursuit of transformation of societal ills.

The Guru also set clear markers in other areas. He defended the attack on contents of the Granth. When faced with sure attack on his person he chose the path of prayer rather than prepare to defend his self. When he was asked to act against

27. Asa M V, p. 394.

his beliefs he chose to face gruesome tortures and die rather than submit. Sikh resistance therefore was tested to the extreme and the Guru did not give up his resolve nor did he utter a word of hate. He just raised the bar.

GURU HARGOBIND [1606-44]

Sikhs were stunned at the torture and martyrdom of Guru Arjan and rallied around young Hargobind who was barely 11 when nominated to succeed. The groundswell in spirit of resistance that reverberated through the small but growing community was given a visible expression by the Guru. He recruited an armed retinue of trusted guards, wore an aigrette on his turban, sported two swords and moved around with a canopy overhead. He took to hunting and was addressed as 'sacha patshah' - the true king - by the Sikhs. Opposite the Harmandir he constructed Akal Takhat, the Temporal Seat of the Divine, and held court there. Sikhs remember him as *miri te piri da malik*, the master of temporal and spiritual power. Soon his armed retinue increased to a stable of seven hundred horses and sixty gunners (topchi).

When this news reached Jahangir he demanded that the Guru pay the fine imposed on his father. The Guru refused and was imprisoned in the fort at Gwalior where several other political prisoners of high status were also lodged. Tradition has it that when released he would accept to be released only if the other detainees were freed and secured release of fifty-two Hindu princes. Over time relations of the Guru with Jahangir are said to have turned friendly.

The first armed encounter took place in 1621 following a skirmish in which one Bhagwan Das Kehrar who opposed Guru Hargobind's plan to found the town of Hargobindpur was killed in a hand to hand fight with Sikhs.²⁸ The son of Bhagwan Das and his supporters sought the help of Nawab

28. For a detailed account see Gurbachan Singh Nayyar, *The Sikhs in Ferment*, New Delhi, 1992, p. 46-48.

Abdula Khan, the area Faujdar who sent a force of 1500 led by Bhai Jattu against the Sikhs. In a series of actions the troop leader as well as two sons of the Faujdar were killed following which the Faujdar too took to the battle and was killed. Though there was significant loss of life on both sides Sikhs came out victorious.

Shahjahan who succeeded Jahangir in 1627 reverted to earlier policies like destruction of incomplete temples and relations with the Guru also became strained. An armed conflict with the Mughals erupted in 1628 when a posse of 7,000 was sent under Mukhlis Khan to arrest the Guru on the pretext of securing release of a royal hawk from the Sikhs. Guru Hargobind who was busy making preparations for wedding of his daughter moved the marriage to a village nearby and thus evaded arrest. Sikhs waylaid the returning royal troops inflicting heavy casualties including Mukhlis Khan who was killed.

Again in two years there was a skirmish where the Imperial troops sent to support Guru's adversary in a land dispute at Hargobindpur were badly mauled. The third conflict arose when Imperial soldiers secured a horse intended for the Guru. A Sikh kidnapped it. Again the attacking Muslim forces lost. The Guru returned to Kartarpur a year later where he was encircled by troops led by Painde Khan, who earlier had been in the Guru's employ. In a tough fight Sikhs again were successful and Painde Khan was killed.

Guru Hargobind retired to Kiratpur in 1635 to ward off further conflict with the Mughal government. He spent the remaining nine years of his life there. His son Gurditta worked hard to strengthen the missionary but there were setbacks. Around the same time as the Guru moved to Kiratpur, the son of Prithia assumed control at Amritsar. Gurditta died in 1638, his son Dhirmal turned against the grand father and left with the original rescension of Granth in his possession.

His ministry saw the transformation of Sikh resistance to armed defense in the event of being attacked. He did not initiate any fight but did not evade it when it was inevitable.

Sikh and Punjabi response to Guru's resistance was overwhelming and even though the internal strife seemed to be on the rise Sikhs were infused with a new sense of vigor and resurgent confidence in themselves. Bhai Gurdas points to the Guru's valor as vanquisher in battles fought for good of others.²⁹

HAR RAI [1644-61]

Guru Har Rai kept a contingent of 2,200 cavalry as his personal guard and continued to live at Kiratpur. There was no armed conflict in his time but when Aurangzeb ascended to the throne his detractors reported to him that the Guru had blessed and assisted escape of Dara Shikoh who was his rival in the succession struggle. Aurangzeb ordered the Guru to appear in the royal court of Delhi. Guru refused to go himself but sent his son Ram Rai instead. There the Qazis asserted to Ram Rai that Guru Nanak's verse '*mitti musalman di*' was derogatory of Muslims. Ram Rai pleaded that the actual text says – *beiman* – [a word that rhymes with the original and means] 'faithless' and not 'Musalman.' Guru Har Rai hearing of this disowned Ram Rai and he had to stay on in Delhi under the patronage of Aurangzeb. This once again gave the message that the text of Gurbani was sacrosanct and the Gurus will protect its integrity even at the cost of sacrificing the bond between father and son.

HAR KISHAN [1661-64]

He became Guru at the age of five. Aurangzeb asked to see him through Raja Jai Singh who was a devotee of the Guru. The Guru came to Delhi on the condition that he will not see Aurangzeb and stayed with Jai Singh. The reason was that Ram Rai was close to Aurangzeb and bore enmity to the Guru because of succession. The meeting therefore could only have exacerbated the already tenuous relations with the Mughals.

29. *dal bhanjan gut surma vadh jodha bau parupkari.*

TEGH BAHADUR [1664-75]

Tegh Bahadur was the youngest son of Guru Hargobind. Attempts to physically harm the Guru started by Prithia in Arjan's time continued. Dhir Mal, grandson of Guru Hargobind who was not happy with succession of Guru Tegh Bahadur is said to have sent his men to attack the Guru. His house was ransacked and the Guru was shot at and wounded. When Guru Tegh Bahadur went to Amritsar he was refused entry into the Golden Temple then under the control of Harji, grandson of Prithi Chand. The Guru came back to Kiratpur to the jealousy of local family and decided to acquire a tract of land and founded the town of Chak Nanaki in 1665, named in honor of his mother (later to be known as Anandpur Sahib).

Guru undertook his missionary tour of the east in August 1665 possibly in response to the request of Bhai Bulaki Das and Bhai Hulas Chand from Dacca and Bhai Darbara and Bhai Chain Sukh from Patna. These Sikhs had met the Guru at Kiratpur and begged him to visit their land in the east with his family. He arrived at the village of Sasram where lived a very devout disciple called Chacha Phagoo who had built a mansion and within it placed a superb couch for the Guru. On reaching Patna, Bhai Jaita a disciple, took the Guru to his residence.

Meanwhile Aurengzeb besides having Ram Rai in his control was ratcheting up pressure on Hindus. In 1665 he forbade them to have illuminations at Diwali. In 1669 governors of all provinces were directed to destroy schools and temples of infidels and in 1671 he issued an order that Muslims only could hold crown lands. In 1674 lands held in religious grants by Hindus in Gujarat were confiscated. Around then Iftikhar Khan Governor of Kashmir started forcible conversion of Hindus to Islam that led Kashmiri Pandits led by Pandit Kirpa Ram to request the Guru to intercede on their behalf. Guru Tegh Bahadur, after some deliberation and a remark by his son, told them to inform Aurangzeb that if he could make the Guru to embrace Islam they would follow suit. [He later taught

Sanskrit to Guru Gobind Singh, became a Khalsa, fought in the battle of Chamkaur and was killed].

Guru Tegh Bahadur accompanied by three devout followers was arrested soon after and brought to Delhi. The Guru was made to watch his one companion killed by sawing his body in two, another by being boiled alive and the third by burning alive. On November 11, 1675 Guru Tegh Bahadur was publicly beheaded. A Sikh collected the Guru's head under cover of darkness to evade reprisals and carried it to Anandpur Sahib. Another Sikh was able to bring the Gurus headless body to his house a few miles from the city where he cremated it by setting the house on fire.

Guru Tegh Bahadur has dwelt on the theme of fearlessness in his compositions quite a few times. Fearlessness is one of the attributes of God mentioned in the opening line, the creedal statement, in the Granth. Guru Tegh Bahadur seeks the gift of fearlessness for his own self and bares his soul saying 'the fear of death has entered my heart and I cling to the protection of Your sanctuary. O ocean of mercy please save my honor. I am a great sinner, foolish and greedy who has now realized that sinful life is futile but I cannot forget the fear of dying and this anxiety is consuming my body. To achieve liberation I have run around in all directions but have not understood the secret of mystery of the pure, immaculate One who abides deep within my heart. I have no merit, and I know nothing about meditation or austerities; please tell me what should I do now? Says Nanak, I am exhausted and seek Your sanctuary; please bless me with the gift of fearlessness.'³⁰

30. *har joo raakh layho pat mayree. jam ko taraas bha-i-o ur antar saran gahee kirpaa'niDh tayree. . mahaa patit mugaDh lobhee fun karat paap ab haaraa.bhai marbay ko bisrat naahin tih chintaa tan jaaraa. kee-ay upaav mukat kay kaaran dah dis ka-o uth Dhaa-i-aa. ghat hee bheetar basai niranjan taa ko maram na paa-i-aa. naahin gun naahin kachh jap tap ka-un karam ab keejai.naanak haar pari-o sarnaagat abhai daan parabh deejai - Jaitsree, M IX, p. 703.*

The influence and corrosive effect of fear on the lives of men was his continuing concern. He believed that in an ideal setting people should neither live in fear nor cause others to live in fear. One who realizes the truth of this dictum, call him spiritually wise.³¹ This no doubt was the inspirational thought defining his approach to resistance.

Guru Gobind Singh later wrote in his autobiographical account that 'in a great event in the Iron Age Tegh Bahadur protected the forehead mark and sacred thread (of Hindus). For the sake of saints, he laid down his head without even uttering a sigh. For the sake of Dharma, he sacrificed himself. He laid down his head but not his creed. The saints of the Lord abhor the performance of miracles and malpractices – DOHRA - breaking potsherd of body head of the king of Delhi (Aurangzeb), he left for the abode of the Lord. None could perform such a feat as that of Tegh Bahadur. The entire world bemoaned departure of Tegh Bahadur. What the world lamented, the gods hailed his arrival in heavens.³²

Guru Tegh Bahadur gave his life so Hindus could have their freedom of faith. This he understood to be his dharma, his creed that all men, without distinction must have this freedom even if it takes him to give up his life to arouse people's consciousness. His concern could not have been more forcefully articulated in any other way. There surely was a man whose prayer for gift of fearlessness had been accepted in the Divine court!

31. *bhai kaahoo ka-o dayt neh neh bhai maanat'aan. kaho naanak sun ray manaa gi-aanee taahi bakhaan* – Slok 16 M IX, p. 1427.

32. *Tilak janjhoo raakhaa Prabh taa kaa Koono ba?o kaloo maih saakaa Saadhan het(i) itoo jin(i) karoo Soos(u) dooaa par soo na ucharoo Dharam het(i) saakaa jin kooaa Soos(u) dooaa par sirar(u) na dooaa Naatak chetak kooe kukanjaa Prabh logan kah aavat laajaa — thookar(i) phor(i) Diloos(i) sir(i) Prabh pur kooyaa payaan | | Teg Bahaadur soo kriaa karoo na koon-hoon aan Teg Bahaadur ke chalet bhayo jagat ko sok Hai hai hai sabh jag bhayo jai jai jai sur lok – Bachitar Natak p. 131.*

GURU GOBIND SINGH [1675-1708]

Guru Gobind Singh and Sikhs were obviously traumatized at the martyrdom of a second Guru. His life is a saga of struggle and we will look at a few of the incidents in the light of his own writings to reflect on his thoughts and his experience.

At Bhangani

Around 1685 he repaired to Paonta for a very productive period of his life when in the solitude of hills he did a lot of his writing. It was here that he had to defend against an armed attack in 1688 and describes the reason for start of the battle of Bhangani thus: 'I left my home and went to place named Paonta. I enjoyed my stay and saw amusement of various kinds on the banks of Kalindri (Yamuna). I killed many lions, blue bulls and bears. On this the king Fateh Shah became angry and fought with me without any reason'.³³ In the course of the battle he says 'filled with rage Hari Chand drew out his bow and shot his arrow which struck my horse. He aimed and shot the second arrow towards me but Lord protected me and his arrow only grazed my ear. Again the Lord saved his servant when his third arrow penetrated deep into the buckle of my waist-belt. Its edge touched my body, but did not cause a wound. When the edge of the arrow touched my body, it kindled my resentment. I raised the bow, aimed the arrow on a warrior, shot the arrow and killed him. When a volley of arrows was showered all the warriors fled. Hari Chand was killed and his brave soldiers were trampled. The chief of Kot Lehar was seized by death. Filled with fear all the hill-men fled from the battlefield. I gained victory through the favor of

33. *Des chaal ham te pun(i) bhao Sahar paanvtaa koo sudh(i) laoo Kaalindroo tattee kare bilaasaa Anik bhaant(i) ke pekh tamaasaa Tah ke singh ghane chun(i) maare Rojh roochh bahu bhaant(i) bidaare Fatesaah kopaa tab(i) raajaa Loh paraa ham so bin(u) kaajaa* - Dasam Granth, p. 143-4.

the Eternal One'.³⁴

The line up at Bhangani was Rajas Fateh Chand of Garhwal, Bhim Chand of Kahlur, Kirpal of Katoch, Gopal of Guler, Hari Chand of Hadur, of Jaswal, Chandel and Dahwal plus 400 Pathaan mercenaries vs. the Guru and his Khattris, Pir Budhu Shah with his 700 followers, 100 Pathaan mercenaries.

The description of the battle in Bachitra Natak names several of Guru's Sikhs. The killed on the other side are mostly Afghans – names mentioned include Hayat Khan and Nijabat Khan. Nijabat Khan and Sango Shah were locked in a struggle when some more Khans pounced on Shah. Both Nijabat Khan and Sango Shah were killed and when the Guru saw Sango Shah being killed he shot three arrows and killed Bhikhan Khan and two more Khans. Raja Hari Chand was killed fighting furiously. The active fighting seemingly was between Sikhs on one side and Khans, Hari Chand and possibly Gopal of Guler on the other. The rest of Rajas left.

The conflict was forced on the Guru who when thus challenged in his peaceful pursuit of life to defend himself, did not hesitate to do so. He sees forcible disruption of innocent enjoyment of life as wicked and tyrannical and sums up the result of battle as protection of the virtuous against the wicked. He says: 'Saints were protected and the wicked were killed. The tyrants were hanged till they breathed no more and perished like dogs.'³⁵

34. *Haroochand kope kamaanang sanbhaarang Pratham baajooyang taan baanang prahaarang Dutooyataak kai toor mo kau chalaayang Rakhio daooov mai kaan chhvai kai sidhaayang Tritooya baan maariyo su petoo majhaarang Bidhiang chilkatang duaal paarang padhaarang Chubhi chinch charamang kachhoo ghaae na aayang Kalang kevalang jaan daasang bachaayang Jabai baan laagyo Tabai ros jaagyo Karang lai kamaanang Hanang baan taanang Sabai boor dhaae Saroghang chalaae Tabai taak(i) baanang Hanyo ek juaanang Haroochand mare Su jodhaa lataare Su Kaaro'-raayang Vahai kaal ghaayan Ranang tiaag(i) bhaage Sabai traas page Bhao joot meroo Kripaa kaal keroo – Dasam Granth, p. 148.*

35. *Sant ubaar dust sabh ghaae taang taang kar(i) hane nidaanaa Kookar jim(i) tin taje paraanaa – Dasam Granth, p. 149.*

After his victory the Guru did not stay at Paonta but returned and established the village of Anandpur. He says that he patronized those who fought bravely and turned out from the town those who did not join the forces.³⁶

Battle of Nadaun

The Guru and his Sikhs were involved in another battle with a Mughal commander, Alif Khan, at Nadaun on 20 March 1691. The Guru says that Bhim Chand asked for assistance when intimidated by Alif Khan out of enmity and he helped out. The line up at Nadaun was Alif Khan, Rajas Kirpal of Kangra and Dayal of Bijrawal plus Rajputs of Nanglua and Panglo tribes vs. Bhim Chand of Kahlur, Prithvi Chand of Dadhwal, Sukhdeo of Jasrot, Raja of Jaswal, Raj Singh, Ram Singh plus the Guru. During action when he saw several Rajput groups supporting Alif Khan come together to attack, the Guru used his weapons and the Lord again brought the victory: 'Much time passed in this way. Mian Khan came to Jammu (for collection of revenue) and sent Alif Khan to Nadaun. Alif Khan developed enmity towards Bhim Chand and prepared a wooden fort on Navras hill. Bhim Chand called me for assistance and he went to prepare their arrows and guns and fight — Rajputs of the tribes of Nanglua and Panglu advanced along with the soldiers of Jaswar and Guler. Great warrior Dayal saved the honor of the people of Bijharwal and also joined the battle. Then this lowly person (the Guru) took his gun, aimed unerringly at one of the chiefs and fired. He reeled and fell to the ground but even then he thundered in anger. I then threw away the gun, took arrows in my hand and shot four of them. Another three I discharged with my left hand, whether they struck anybody, I do not know. Then the Lord brought

36. *Judh joot ane jabai tikai na tin pur paanv Kaahloor main baandhiyo aan aanandpur gaanv Je je nar tah nab hire doone nagar nikaar Je tih thaur bhale bhire tinai karoo pratipaar* — Dasam Granth p. 149.

end to the fight as the enemy was driven out into the river.³⁷

Alif Khan's or any Muslim soldier's name does not figure in the narrative of the fighting. It seems that one of group of hill chiefs was fighting another group. No Muslims names are mentioned among the casualties. About end to the conflict the Guru says 'Alif Khan fled away leaving back his belongings. All the other warriors also did not stay and were gone. I remained there on the bank of the river for eight more days and visited the palaces of all the chiefs. Then I took leave and came home, they went there to settle the terms of peace. Both the parties made an agreement.'³⁸

Khanzada

Dilawar Khan who attained power in Punjab while Aurangzeb was in the Deccan sent his son Khanzada with a force of one thousand men to attack the Guru at night. A Sikh who saw them crossing the river informed the Guru. The Sikhs fired shots in the air and made other noises and the attackers beat a retreat. He says 'the heroes form my side thundered and the blood thirsty Khans fled away without using their weapons. —They could not touch me because of the grace of Lord and

37. *Bahut kaal eh bhaant(i) bitaayo Mooaan Khaan janmoō kah aayo Alaf Khaan Naadaun pathaavaa Bhoomchand tan bair ba'haavaa Juddh kaaj nrip hamai bulaayo aap(i) tavan koo or sidhaayo Tin kath ga Navras par baandhyo Toor tuphang naresan saadhyo — Chale Naangloo Paangloo vedolang Jasvaare Gulere chale baandh tolang Tahaan ek baajio mahaan boor Diaalang Rakhoo laaj jaune sabhai Bijha'vaalang Tavang koot tau lau tuphangang sanbhaaro Hridai ek raavant ke takk(i) maaro Girio jhoom bhoomai kariyo judh suddhang Taoo maar(i) boliyo mahaa maan(i) kruddhang Tajiyo tupakang baan paanang sanbhaare Chatur baanyang lai su sabhiyang prahaare Triyo baan lai baam paanang chalaae Lage yaa lage na kachhoo jaan(i) paae So tau lau daooov jd h koono ujhaarang Tinai khed kai baar(i) ke booch aarang — Dasam Granth, p. 150—52.*

38. *Bhajo alaf khaanang na khaanaa sanbhaario Bhaje aur boorang na dhoorang bichaario Nadoo pai dinanaang ast koone mukaamang Bhaloo bhaant(i) dekhe sabai raaj dhaamang It ham hoe bidaa ghar aae Sulah namit vai utah(i) sidhaae sandh(i) inai un kai sang(i) kaoo — Dasam Granth, p. 153.*

fled away. They could not do any harm here by His favor but they were filled with great anger and returning plundered and destroyed village Barwa before halting at Bhallon.³⁹

Hussain Conflict & Muazzam's Role

After failure of Khanzada Dilawar Khan sent Hussain. He plundered houses on the way and overpowered Raja of Dadhwal and took his sons as slaves. He then plundered Doon. Raja of Guler, Gopal along with Ram Singh came to see Hussain and offered him some money but they could not agree and Gopal returned. Hussain who was supported by Rajas Kirpal and Bhim Chand got mad and besieged Guler for two days. Gopal sued for peace and asked the Guru's help in negotiating a settlement with Hussain. The Guru sent Sangtia with an escort of seven troopers for the purpose. Hussain demanded ten thousand rupees. Sangtia asked Gopal to promise on oath but they could not reach any settlement and a battle ensued in which Hussain, Kirpal and Guru's envoy Sangtia and his seven troopers were all killed. Raja Gopal was victorious. The Guru's comment at the end of this conflict was 'the victory was gained and the battle ended. All thought of their homes and went back. God protected me from the cloud of battle, which rained elsewhere.'⁴⁰

Dilawar Khan was very angry at the debacle of Hussain and sent some cavalry that was joined by Jujhar Singh and Raja of Chandel. They captured Bhallan but were opposed by Gaj Singh and Parmanand, Raja of Jaswar. Chandan Rai and Jujhar Singh were killed and the horse cavalry went back.

These repeated failures of the imperial forces caused anxiety to Aurangzeb and he sent his son Prince Muazzam for

39. *Ite boor gajje bhae naad bhaare Bhaje Khaan khoonoo binaa sastra jhaare — Barvaa gaaon ujaar kai kare mukaam Bhalaan Prabh bal hamai na chihue sakai bhaajat bhae nidaan Tah bal oohaa na par sakai Barvaa hanaa risaae — Dasam Granth, p. 155.*

40. *Joot bhaoo ran bhayo ujhaaraa 'Simrit(i) kar(i) sabh gharo sidhaaraa Raakh(i) looyo ham ko jagraao Loh ghataa antaoo barsaao — Dasam Granth, p. 166.*

restoration of order in the hills. The Prince took charge in August 1696. Narrating this part the Guru says 'this made Aurangzeb very angry and he sent his son to Punjab. On his arrival people were frightened and hid themselves in big hills. They did not understand the ways of Almighty and tried to frighten me also — the son of Aurangzeb got angry and sent a subordinate in this direction and he demolished homes of those who had fled turning their face from me. Those who turn away from the Guru, their houses are demolished in this and the next world. They are ridiculed here and also do not get any abode in heaven. They remain disappointed in all things — God Himself created the successors of both Baba (Nanak) and Babar. Recognize the former as the spiritual king and the later as temporal king.'⁴¹

Towards the end of Bachitar Natak the Guru offers a supplicatory hymn that 'at all times, the Lord has protected saints, exhibited His marvelous state to them and saved them from all sufferings and He has destroyed all the malevolent and malicious persons, subjecting them to great agony. Considering me as Your servant, You have helped me and protected me with Your own hands.'⁴²

We should note here that in the battle of Bhangani the Guru had to fight a group of Rajas including Bhim Chand and in the battle of Nadaun he accepted to support Bhim Chand, whereas some of that Raja's compatriots helped Alif Khan. In

41. *Tab Aurang man maah(i) risaavaa Maddra Des ko poot pathaavaa Tihh aavat sabh lok daraane Bae bae gir her lukaane Hamhoon logan adhik araayo Kaal karam ko maram na paayo — Tab Aurang joa maanjh risaa Ek ahdoaa oohaana pathaa Ham te bhaj(i) bimukh je gae Tin ke dhaam giraavat bhae Je apne Gur te much phir-hai eehaan oohaana tin ke grih gir(i)-hain Ihaan uphaas na sur pur baasaa Sabh baatan te rahai niraasaa — Baabe ke Baabar ke doo aap kare Parmesar sooo Doon saah in ko pahichaano Dunoo patt(i) un kau anumaano - Dasam Granth, p. 169-71.*

42. *Sarab kaal sabh saadh ubaare Dukh(u) dai kai dokhoo sabh mare Adbhut(i) gat(i) bhagtan dikhraai Sabh sankat te lae bachaano Sabh sankat te sant bachaa Sabh kantan kantan jim ghaae Dnas jaan muh(i) karoo sahaae aap haath dai layo bachaae - Dasam Granth, p. 174.*

both cases the Guru was on the side defending aggression and against intimidation whether it was by a Hindu or a Muslim chieftain. Bhim Chand again was an adversary of Gopal who sought Guru's help to conciliate conflict with Hussain.

His conciliatory role and influence is clear from his staying on after the battle of Nadaun and visiting with all the chiefs that eventually helped bring them to a settlement though he does not claim credit for it. He was again asked by Gopal to help and he sent Sangatia to help negotiations with Hussain.

On reading the text one does not fail to notice that he is equally praising of valor whether it is by the enemy or defenders. Witness the lavish praise for Kirpal Chand, the Kangra Chief as a true, valiant Rajput whose bravery was praised in the nine regions of the world – he was ally of Alif Khan. Likewise the Guru praises Hussain, Jujhar Singh, Gopal and so many others for their bravery. His manner of presentation is such as if he is a witness and not a participant to the conflict.

We should also note that he say he was victorious in the battles of Bhangani and Nadaun. We may compare the victory as it is seen in two situations – one over evil instincts as in Guru Arjan's *halemi raj* and the other over external threat as in these conflicts. The Guru says in the first case that his defeated adversaries can no more challenge him whereas in the second case there is no claim to an abiding harmony prevailing – only the imminent threat was removed, or contained or defused. In other words individual transformation, if achieved is a victory but at societal level eliminating, suppressing or controlling a threat is a victory too. Societal transformation is a process that takes much longer, even ages.

Creation of The Khalsa

Guru Gobind Singh created the order of Khalsa in April 1699. This sent a strong message of Sikh resolve to make themselves strong to be able to defend their person, property and values from predators and oppressors. The process of initiation into the fraternity created a variety of symbolisms to remind Sikhs

of their cherished postulates. Asking the initiates to drink off from a shared cup signaled a formalized rejection of caste prejudices. Narrow loyalties were de-emphasized in favor of a broader communal identity by dropping caste from names. The outward symbols also reflected on their determination to carve out their place in the society on their own in full glare of visibility. These changes did not as such bring about a change in Sikh approach to resistance but it definitely made people around take notice and in several cases, with rising concern about the impact of these changes on vested elitist interests.

First Battle Of Anandpur

The immediate effect of creation of the Khalsa was a deep sense of insecurity and anxiety among hill Rajas. It is significant that prior the Baisakhi of 1699 even though Hindus had viewed the rise of Sikhism as a threat to their faith, their resistance mostly took the form of inciting trouble within the house of the Gurus or imperil their relations with the rulers. Violent incidences against Sikhs were rare – battle of Bhangani being one. The position changed and as we will see in what follows.

The Rajas in early 1701 sought help of Delhi government to subdue the Sikhs and Delhi sent Din Beg and Painde Khan each with five thousand men to support their attack. Painde Khan was killed in a fierce battle and the hill chiefs left the field. Din Beg was wounded and he beat a retreat.

Second Battle Of Anandpur

Again later in 1701, the Rajas of Jammu, Nurpur, Mandi, Bhutan, Kullu, Kionthal, Guler, Chamba, Srinagar, Dadhwal, Handur and others assembled at Bilaspur to take stock of the situation. Raja Ajmer Chand of Kahlur proposed that if they repeatedly ask assistance from Delhi to subdue Sikhs they might be taken over by the Mughals. The best course of action for them was to act on their own and accordingly they marched onto Anandpur and asked the Guru for rent for the city. The Guru

refused saying that the land on which the town was built had been purchased his father. At this the hill Rajas launched an attack but could not overcome the Sikhs by direct assault. They then put the city under siege lasting for a few weeks but it was not successful.

Battle Of Nirmoh

Frustrated, toward end of 1701, Raja Ajmer Chand sent an envoy to Sirhind and another to Delhi seeking their help to expel the Guru from Anandpur. At the same time through an intermediary, the hill chiefs proposed to the Guru that if he left Anandpur for a while and come back later they would be always be friends with him. The Guru agreed and left for Nirmoh. Once the Guru was at Nirmoh Ajmer Chand and Raja of Kangra launched an attack on Sikhs even before the Mughal help arrived. The Guru repelled the attacks but decided to move to Basoli whose Raja had been inviting him. Overjoyed the hill chiefs presented elephants to Wazir Khan wh arrived by then to help them. After staying a few days at Basoli the Guru returned to Anandpur. Finding the Guru back at Anandpur and firmly in control, Ajmer Chand sued for peace followed by other hill Rajas.

Third Battle Of Anandpur

Hostilities erupted again in 1703 when Raja Ajmer Chand and Rajas of Handur, Chamba and Fatehpur attacked the Guru's forces at Anandpur. The Sikhs fought courageously and hill chiefs had to retire from the battle in despair.

Fourth Battle Of Anandpur

The hill chiefs persevered and on their repeated requests Delhi sent a large force under the command of Saiyad Khan in March 1704 to subdue the Guru. Saiyad Khan was a brother-in-law of Pir Budhu Shah who had fought on the side of the Guru at the battle of Bhangani. On his way to Anandpur he met Pir Budhu Shah. Favorably influenced, during the ensuing battle he defected

to the Guru. Ramzan Kha took over the command and put Sikhs under relentless pressure. The Guru decided to evacuate Anandpur. Mughal forces plundered the city and retired to Sirhind. Sikhs attacked them at night, got their loot back and the Guru returned to Anandpur.

Fifth Battle Of Anandpur & Battle Of Chamkaur

The turn of events caused major concern at Delhi and the Governors of Sirhind, Lahore and Kashmir were ordered to proceed against the Guru. They were aided by more than a dozen hill chiefs and Gujars and Ranghars of the area and attacked Anandpur. In spite of strong rallies success evaded the attackers for several days. They then laid a siege and cut off the supplies. Some Sikhs lost heart and forty of them left after signing a disclaimer renouncing their relation with the Guru.

In the meantime Raja Ajmer Chand's envoy offered safe passage to the Guru if Anandpur was evacuated. The Guru assured by oaths on the Salagram and the Quran let it be known that he would send his valuables first. When the caravan reached enemy lines they started to loot the treasure that turned out to be rubbish.

At last through an envoy the Guru was brought a signed letter from the Emperor saying, "I have sworn on the Quran not to harm you and if I do, may I not find a place in God's court hereafter! Cease warfare and come to me and if you do not desire to do so, then go wheresoever you please." The hill Rajas also swore that they would allow safe passage to the Guru. By then his force had dwindled and he finally decided to leave Anandpur at night on 20-21 December 1705. Notwithstanding sworn assurances Sikhs were pursued as they were leaving and the Guru decided to get across the flooded Sarsa River. Many got drowned and the Guru's mother with two younger sons got separated from the group. The Guru with his two elder sons and forty Sikhs decided to face the enemy from within the Garhi of (mud fortress) Chamkaur.

They were soon besieged by the pursuing troops. The Sikhs held on fighting in batches of five. Both sons of the Guru asked to be allowed to go and fight and were killed fighting. Guru then got ready to go in combat but the Sikhs passed a 'Gurmatta' (resolution) asking him not to and to leave the fortress. He accepted their instruction and left. Wandering lonesome in the wilderness of Machhiwara the Guru pensively poured his heart out, 'do convey to my dear friend the state of His disciples. Without Thee a comforter covering is like lying in sickness; the house no different than a den of serpents; the flask like a spike and the cup feels like a dagger. This separation tears at me like a butcher's knife. Pleasing to me is the pallet of my cherished Friend; pleasures only consuming flames.'⁴³ No rancor, just humble acceptance of and submission to whatever transpired in His will.

Daya Singh, Dharam Singh and Man Singh caught up with him. They finally were able to reach the safety of Rai Kot with help of two Muslims. Here the Guru learnt of the heroic death of his other two sons at the hands of Wazir Khan at Sirhind. The Guru stayed at Dina for a few days, wrote 'Zafarnama' and sent it through Bhai Daya Singh and Dharam Singh to Aurangzeb in Deccan. This letter is said to have made him repentant and he asked for travel arrangements to be made for the Guru so he could meet him. The Guru decided to proceed to the south to see Aurangzeb but received news of his death on the way and did not go further.

In the battle of succession that followed Bahadur Shah sought help from the Guru and promised that he would be fair and just to all and undo wrongs committed by his father. The Guru sent a detachment to help him. Bahadur Shah was victorious and presented the Guru a royal robe of honor at his coronation in Agra on July 24, 1707. The Guru later accompanied

43. *Mitra piaare noon haal mureedaan daa saihnaa Tudh (u) bin (u) rog (u) rajaaeaaan daa orhan naag nivaasaan de raihnaa Sool suraahikhanjar(u) piaalaa bing kasaaeeaan daa saihnaa Yaaraarhe daa saanoon satthar(u) changaa bhatth kherhiaan daa raihnaa* - Dasam Granth, p. 1347.

the King to South and parted company to go to Nanded where he reached in July 1708. Two Muslim intruders attacked him on October 7, 1708. He chased and killed one of them but succumbed to his injuries and died. Significantly the King ordered on Oct 28th for the grant of a dress of mourning to the son of the Muslim who was killed and two days later for the same to Guru Gobind Singh's family. Sikhs wondered if there was a possible complicity of the King in the attack on the Guru and if the laudation said to have been showered by the Guru on him was deserved.

Zafarnama

We will now look at Zafarnama⁴⁴ or the Epistle of Victory, a verse in Persian, written in 1706 and addressed to Aurangzeb subsequent to the siege of Anandpur and action at Chamkaur. The composition is a severe indictment of the Emperor and his commanders who had perjured on their oath of providing safe passage to him and his followers. It is reflective and provides a deep insight into the Guru's thoughts on the conflict, its inherent ethical dilemmas and righteous rulership. To facilitate our understanding I am presenting below the gist of his thoughts. The numbers in parenthesis refer to the verse as numbered in the original text.

One who proclaims to be a true believer and faithful to his faith must demonstrate that his belief is not merely a verbal protestation but also guides his societal behavior. He must not break a promise made in all solemnity. (47) If such a person were to make a swearing declaration on his scripture or give an assurance to another in the name of his beliefs then he must live by it. Having given a sworn solemn undertaking of safe passage he ought not to have pounced on the party assured to kill and imprison them when having left their defenses they were vulnerable. (25) That man is real who says what is in his heart. There is no gap between his speech and intent. (55)

44. For full text see Dasam Granth, Chapter 14, pp. 2263-72.

He questions the way force was used by his Commanders and his response saying, 'what kind of chivalry is this in war, that countless hosts should pounce upon just forty of us. (41) I had perforce to join battle with your hosts at that stage and I too fought with the muskets and arrows as best as I could, (21) because when a situation is past every other remedy it is righteous to unsheathe the sword to defend and to dispel the aggressor. (22) I would have had nothing to do with this battle otherwise. (23) But even as we fought we did not hurt or molest those who had not aggressed against us. (28)

The Guru asks what could have been achieved by killing his four tender sons, when he, like a coiled snake remained behind. (78) Bravery does not consist in putting out a few sparks and in the process stir up a fire to rage all the more! (79)

The Guru makes several comments about what a king should or should not do. A king must be cognizant that God could not have wished for him to create strife but instead to promote peace, harmony and tranquility among the people. (65) Nor should the ruler use his strength, power and resources to harass, suppress or deprive the weak. This will only weaken the society, erode his ability to rule effectively and make the State unsafe. (109) He should not recklessly shed blood of others lest heaven's rage should befall him. (69)

The Guru is unsparing in his indictment of Aurangzeb for his tyranny and lack of religiosity. He says 'I believe that you know not God, since, from you have come only tyrannous acts. (85) The Beneficent God also will know thee not and will not welcome thee with all thy riches. (86) I will not trust you even for a moment if now you swear a hundred times on the Koran. (87) I will not enter your presence or travel on the same road even if you so ordain. (88) O Aurangzeb, king of kings, you are fortunate, an expert swordsman and a horseman too (89) — ornament of the throne, master of the world, but far from religion! (94)

In spite of all that happened the Guru is gracious, kind

and compassionate and wants the matter to be brought to close without any lingering resentment. He says 'if only you were gracious enough to come to the village of Kangar, we could then see each other face to face. (58) Come to me so that we may converse with each other, and I may utter some kind words to thee. (60) You are bound, indeed by your word on the Koran, let, therefore, the matter come to a good end, as is your promise. (76) On the way there will be no danger to your life for the whole tribe of Brars accepts my command. (59) I will send thee a horseman like one in a thousand, who will conduct thee, safe to my home. (61)'

Guru's faith in divine protection and inconsequentiality of human power is complete. He says 'Beware; the world keeps not faith with any. He who rises also falls and comes to grief. (96) And look also at the miracle that is God; He may destroy a whole host through a single man! (97) He who trusts in an oath on God, God also shows him the path and is his protection in need (43) [for] He rains His mercy on those who act in good faith, (101) blinds the enemy and protects the helpless in time of need from injury and harm. (100) What harm can the enemy do if God is one's friend? (110) Let them launch a thousand assaults yet they will not be able to touch even a hair on his head. (111) So not a hair of mine was touched nor my body suffered for God, the destroyer of my enemies pulled me out to safety. (44)'

The account of episodes at Anandpur points to intensification of open attacks on the Guru by Hindu Rajas. It also seems that what started out as use of force by Hindu Rajas against the Sikhs turned in no time into a bloody struggle that ended up directing the Sikh ire and sense of righteous indignation against the Muslim ruling elite. The Guru has mentioned in Zafarnama that he too vanquished hill Rajas and that they were idol worshippers to his being an idol breaker [verse 95]. Beyond that there is no mention of Hindus or suggestion of connivance by Hindus in the treachery of false oaths and assurances given to him. The Guru's reference to

idol worship suggests that he saw the Hindu-Sikh divide rooted in religious differences. These differences did cause Hindus to commit aggression against the Guru but he did not chastise them as 'Hindus' after the battle of Bhangani or the series of attacks launched by them later at Anandpur.

The Guru has also written about the battle of Nadaun that was caused by the enmity that Alif Khan developed against Bhim Chand. He has given account of attempt by Khanzada to attack him at Anandpur. The Guru also penned the story of extortion, plundering, and misadventure by Hussain in graphic detail. He did not approve of their actions but did not characterise their acts as 'Muslim' deeds.

On the other hand he characterized the act of recanting an oath on Quran as irreligious and being not a true Muslim [verse 46] and has condemned it as deceit, perjury, and sinful act. The hill Rajas are also said to have recanted on their solemn assurance in the battle of Nirmoh and also at Anandpur but the Guru did not mention anything whatever about their role in the Zafarnama. No doubt the parallel between the two is tenuous it is difficult to infer that the Sikhs developed such negative sentiment against Muslim rulers for their crippling moral failure in this conflict.

A point that may merit further reflection is persistence by the Guru to not withdraw in spite of mounting odds and pressure from his mother and Sikhs during the fifth battle of Anandpur. Later at Chamkaur after his two elder sons were martyred it is said that his 'expression of mental composure showed glow of divinity upon the glorious end of his sons.'⁴⁵ Was he contemplating the irrevocable play of Divine will? Had he concluded that this was the only possible outcome of this protracted conflict? Was he thinking that this was the way that it should end?

Verses 77 - 80 perhaps offer an explanation. The Guru told Aurangzeb that thoughtless acts of tyranny might stoke fires

45. Gateway to Sikhism, Life of Guru Gobind Singh, Battle of Chamkaur.

rather than put out a spark. By their reckless treachery and killing of minor children of the Guru Muslims made the seeds of resistance spread to sprout far and wide. This was no victory for Aurangzeb. It was the beginning of defeat. Sikhs did not forget the winter of 1705. The saga of Chamkaur, Sirhind and Machhiwara became an unforgettable part of the Sikh lore and the spark lighted that cold winter soon turned into a raging fire against Muslim rulers and foreign invaders who tried to intrude into the land of their Gurus.

FROM PRECEPTS TO CULTURE

The process of acculturation of resistive thought was a continuing one. From the very beginning Sikhi was developed in a congregational setting. Nanak established the town of Kartarpur where the believers lived, worked and prayed together. Successive Gurus gave impetus to this mode and several new communities were developed. Additionally the Gurus encouraged their followers to come together and form congregations – *sangats* – in their own settings. This communal affinity helped in assimilation and transmission of precepts. It also made them conscious of their shared interests and the risks to which their communities were vulnerable.

Guru Amar Das asked the Sikhs to assemble at Goindwal every Diwali and Baisakhi. This created opportunity for them to listen to the Guru and talk among themselves – a process that would have helped reinforce their sense of identity. Heritage sites were increasing – Kartarpur, Khadur, Goidwal, Ramdaspur, Harmandar, Akal Takhat – and with them the Sikh urge to cherish and protect what the Gurus bequeathed to them. Compilation of the *Pothi Sahib* provided a strong anchor.

The structure of Manjis, Piris and Daswandh system administered by Masands brought order into their communal life. They had an organization to guide and support them in their locales and also to generate resources for the centralized activities as directed by the Gurus. In Guru Hargobind's time

the bards sang the songs of valor in *bir ras* as the new symbols of aigrette, canopy, sword and chase nurtured their confidence to carve out their own destiny in spite of the power of forces that had tried to hurt the Gurus and caused the martyrdom of Guru Arjan. They clashed with their oppressors and won. A second Guru martyrdom strengthened their resolve rather than weaken it. They took on the mantle of protectors of universal values.

With Guru Gobind Singh the process of acculturation saw its culmination. The Khalsa had a visible uniform identity and purpose. Ranjit Nagara sounded loud and clear that the Sikh were determined to resist intrusion, insults or oppression. The Sikhs were now ready to make supreme sacrifices to protect what was righteous and resist what was not with the use of arms, if needed. The call of Guru Nanak that 'step onto my path with your head in your hand if you desire to play this game of love. Once you are on, care not for what any one says when the call for making that sacrifice is heard'⁴⁶ was understood and imbibed by the Sikhs.

SUMMING UP

Sikh thought does reflect on social issues that impact the way we are able to live our lives in quiet enjoyment. There are clear markers that would define an ideal society. We have seen an example in the concept of *halemi raj*. The Gurus persuade Sikhs to be aware of ills that pervade our lives and work diligently to overcome them in their personal conduct and help protect the weak and vulnerable from becoming their victims. This task has to be done by the members of the society and while prayer helps, to depend on miracles and charms is futile.

Resistance must be offered to what is evil. Differences out of varying religious beliefs are not seen as evil. The uses of

46. *jo tho praem khaelan ka chao sir dhhar thalee galee maeree aao eith maarag pair dhhareejai sir dheejai kaan n keejai* – Slok Varan te Vadhik, M I, p. 1410.

religion to mislead, cheat, deceive or to gain advantage by a subterfuge using pious credentials is sinful and evil. Problems must be resolved without recourse to use of force but if all else fails then force may be used as a last resort.

In resistive struggle against our personal infirmities victory is achieved when we are able to overcome our weakness [es]. This is hard but if such transformation comes about it is cause for being satisfied and should be an inspiration to motivate one toward larger social good. This struggle is bereft of violence.

At societal level it could be a victory if an imminent conflict is averted. Transformation of societies is a tenuous process. It is gradual and neither persuasion nor violent methods can assure abiding change. It may in certain situations take supreme sacrifices to arouse people's consciousness and to shake them into recognition of their societal ills and start working to eradicate them.

There are clear and strong markers to remind us of our need to be vigilant and resist what is not righteous. Symbols, rituals and artifacts surrounding religious observances do not let Sikh sense of social responsibility easily suffer dilution and help in transmission of these underlying values.

The contours of Sikh resistance, its scriptural basis, the way Gurus responses influenced and defined it should be evident from our discussion. My sense is that Sikh resistance has two facets – the proactive Sikh urge is to blunt the ill effects of institutionalized societal discrimination and ameliorate human condition through encouraging social equality, self-reliance, sharing and *seva*; the reactive part is to not give in to oppression or injustice but to resist it through non violent means even if it means making supreme sacrifices and if all else fails resort to limited use of force to obviate the immediate cause of dissidence. Further work will be needed to construct a paradigm, deconstruct it and see if it stands up to a validating enquiry. That work I hope to be able to present at a later time.

The Sikh resistance to my mind draws inspiration from

resolute espousal of compassion for all. If it needs recourse to use of force to defend righteous values as a last resort when all else has failed, so be it. That is not being militant. Is it?

Notes:

1. The translation of the scriptural text is mine though I have consulted various other sources. Any misreading therefore may be attributed to my limited understanding.
2. I have consulted a few translations of Zafarnama. There are significant differences in various interpretations but with my rudimentary knowledge of Persian I feel that my current understanding may not be widely off the mark. I do however propose to consult more sources.
3. There is considerable controversy surrounding authorship of Dasam Granth and the accounts of battles in Bachittar Natak also have been questioned for their slant in favor of Hindus and ignoring role of Pir Budhu Shah and the like. I have tried to fill some gaps and my sense is that credibility of authorship may not materially affect the tenor of what I am saying.
4. The historical accounts are based on a variety of texts in English. The events and their analysis present a range of views. I feel that on balance the inferences that seem to be emerging from my narration should hold. I would however welcome constructive criticism and suggestions.

DHARTI, DHARAM & DHUR NANAK'S VISION OF ETERNAL HUMAN QUEST

THE SEARCH

Life's experiences can be so compellingly intriguing that we all, ever so often, can but only wonder as to what are we doing here, what is our destination and how do we get there. What is the larger purpose of life? These questions may beget different answers from different people in different states of mind at different times. Broadly however, the human quest is for an understanding of the process of life, its link with the Creator, their place in creation and individual role in society. The inner craving of people of all persuasions is that their life should be a morally, ethically and spiritually enhancing experience which brings them closer to feel the underlying unity of this abiding creation, taste its real bliss and partake in joyous appreciation of the mysteries and miracles of life. The quest for such spiritual progression is universal and common to all men.

The Sikh struggle for spiritual ascent has to be pursued living in this world - *dharti*. The destination is union with - *dhur*- the Primal Lord. The path is - *dharam* - the precept and praxis of persuasion. This article is an attempt to understand the essence of Guru's vision in regard to these as evidenced from Sri Guru Granth Sahib.

GOD, HIS CREATION & DHARTI

The Granth preaches that there is only one God. He is the God of all – one, true, creator, sans fear & enmity, eternal, self-created. There is none above Him. He is kind, caring, loving, benevolent, sustaining, just and forgiving.

For eons upon eons there was just Him. At some point He willed and the creation came into being¹. The act of creation is continuous and the creation expands or regresses as God wills. This creation is real and not illusory. True [real] are the cosmic regions, the galaxies and the forms that Thou hast created. Whatever transpires in the creation is by Thy grace and as Thou will, decide, ordain and decree, says Nanak.²

On the earth abide beings of myriad hues and infinite forms but one single essence pervades the entire multiplicity of cosmic existence. God is immanent in His creation and this world is his home.³

THE HUMAN BEING

Of all living beings God has given humans extra merits⁴. Even as the other beings have their own place and purpose in God's scheme, they also fulfill the purposes of man. God Himself bears the concern for all that He has created.⁵

The human body, a dead mass by itself, is infused with life when God places soul in it. God concurrently endows the human with individual will - *haumain* – the lower self, limited by human faculties, effective to things phenomenal only. Mind, partly subtle and partly gross, is activated when soul inhabits the body.

Created by divine will *haumain* is the basis of man's personality, regulating behavior and conduct – mostly encouraging willful action choices. Mind, the decision center,

1. *hukme dharti sajan* – M III, p.785.

2. *Sache tere khand sache brahmand* - Slok M I, p.463.

3. *eh jag sache ki hai kothri, sache ka vich vaas* - M II, p.463.

4. *manas ko prabh deiye vadiaye* – Maru M V, p.1075.

5. *jin karte karna kiya, chinta bhi karni tahe* - Asa M I, p.467.

has a tendency to be driven by desires — *trishna* - and *haumain*. Though open to influence by the intellect, the desire, lodged deep within, continues to propel *haumain* to continue to strive for its fulfillment. Thus there is direct nexus between desire and individual's choice of actions. The Guru says that even though willfulness likens to a dreadful malady, the remedy also lies therein for with God's grace it can be directed to be in accord with the divine word.⁶

The Sikh scripture recognizes a number of evils but *kam* [lust], *krodh* [anger], *lobh* [greed], *moh* [attachment] and *ahankar* [pride, ego] are frequently mentioned as major human weaknesses that lead men astray. Even though *haumain* is not included in the five it is considered the cause of all evils and if subdued can lead to their extinction. This control of willfulness is at the root of inner human struggle for spiritual development.

DHARTI & DHARAM

The world that we live in has been characterized as *dharti dharamshal* at several places in the Sikh scriptural literature. The first reference is in *pauri* 34 of *japji* where Nanak says: in the midst of nights, days, weeks, seasons; wind, water, fire and nether regions, God established the earth, an abode for *dharam*. In this setting where immutable laws bind the creation to go about its assigned duty in a detached manner, God placed on earth beings of diverse species and hues with various, infinite names and identities. In True God's true court the elect blessed with His beneficent grace are graciously seated to judge the mortals for their deeds and actions - sifting the ripe from the raw, the good from the bad, the worthy from the unworthy. You shall see this verily. O Nanak, when you get there.⁷ The world therefore is arena for *dharma* and our

6. *haumai dheerag rog hai daroo bhi is mahein, kirpa kare jey aapni teh gur ka sabad samahe* — Slok M II, p. 466.

7. *raati ruti thitee var, pawan pani agni patal, tis vich dharti thap rakhi dharamsal, tis vich jio jugat ke rang, tin ke nam anek anant, karmi karmi hoey veechar, sacha aap sacha darbar, tithe sohan panch parwan, nadar karam pave neesan, kach pakai uthe paye, Nanak geaya japai jaye* — M I p.7.

actions and deeds will be scrutinized from their *dharmic* perspective.

In Maroḍ Dakhni the suggestion is that the time window for *dharam* is the life span. God created the earth and made it the home of *dharam*, remaining unattached as the game of birth and death plays on.⁸

Guru Amar Das says this *dharamsal* operates per God's will - God established His seat overseeing the universe and at His command, created the earth, the true home of *dharam*. He, our true Lord, merciful to the meek, creates, sustains, and desolates all and every thing. Such is the wondrous uniqueness of His will. He pervades and lovingly cares for all.⁹

Bhai Gurdas, the scribe of Guru Granth Sahib says in one of his compositions - the true Lord cannot be approached, bears none any ill will and is a unique controller; know you all, that He created the earth as a true arena for *dharam* where one will reap as one sows and take the results of their actions - *karam*.¹⁰

DIMENSIONS OF DHARAM

Thus the creation that we are part of operates within the universal immutable laws epitomizing God's command, will, design and desire. The context for *dharam* is our life on this earth. God gives us the freedom to make our choices and we will be judged, on the scale of *dharam*, for choices, guided by our free will, that we make. To comprehend the meaning and dimensions of *dharam* let us look at the range of interpretations placed on the term as used at various places in the Granth.

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8. *dhart upaey dhari dharamsala, utpat parlo aap nirala* - M I p.1033.
 9. *aape takht rachaon aakas paataala, hukme dharti sajian sachi dharamsala, aap upae khapaida sache deen dayala, sabhna rijk sanbahida tera hukam nirala, aape aap vartada aape pratpala* - Suhi M III, P. 785.
 10. *satgur purkh agam hai nirvair nirala, jaano dharti dharma ki sachi dharamsala, jeha beejai so luney phal karam samaalaa.*

PERSUASION

The word *dharam* is often used to mean faith, religion or persuasion – using the terms interchangeably. This meaning is implicit in several of the verses. Some examples are:

Guru Arjan says of all the religions, the best is to chant the Name of the Lord and live a life of piety.¹¹

Bhagat Ravi Das laments that no one explains to him how to swim across this ocean of life and achieve liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Even though there are ever so many persuasions that people practice - - - and Ravi Das has tried several but he is left sad that love and devotion have not welled up within him nor has his sense of duality gone.¹² Bhagat Namdev sees chanting the Name of the Lord as the highest expression of faith.¹³

CODE OF CONDUCT

From the Word, come religious rituals (*karam*) sacredness and the code of conduct.¹⁴

DUTY

Bhai Gurdas says - per their own *varna* people lived by the duties assigned to their caste and tribe.¹⁵

LIVING BY PERSUASION

Guru Nanak says reflecting on, internalizing the persuasion and *dharam* are related. In other words living by persuasion

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11. *Sarab dharam meh srest dharam, har ko nam jap nirmal karam* -Gauri Sukhmani, M V, p.266.
 12. *Paar kaise payebo re, mo sau koyu neh kahe samjhaey, jaa te avagavn bilaye, rahau, buh bidh dharam niroopey karta deesay sabh loey, kawan karam te chhooteay jeh saadhey sabh sidh hoey, anik jatan nigreh kiye taari neh tarey bharam phaas, prem bhagat nehun oopjai taa te Ravidas udaas* -Gauree Ravdas, p. 346.
 13. *Har kau nam lai ootam dharam* -Gond Nam Dev, p. 874.
 14. *Akhar karam kirt sach dharam* - Gauree M V, p. 261.
 15. *apney apney varn vich chaar varan kul dharam dharande* - Vaar: 5 Pauree 3.

is an index of an individual's *dharmic* orientation.¹⁶

BALANCING/HARMONISING FORCE

In *jap ji*, the Guru says that proverbial *dhaul*, supporting the universe, is *dharma*. Born of compassion, it is the force that keeps the earth and the rest of creation in balance and holds it in an order of contentment or harmony.¹⁷ Thus *dharma* has a dimension of a balancing and harmonizing force.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

There are numerous quotes where righteousness is inherent in the use of the word *dharam* e.g. The Lord above has ordained that mortals must practice righteousness.¹⁸ Again Nanak says modesty and righteousness both, O Nanak, are qualities of those who are blessed with true wealth.¹⁹ Guru Gobind Singh has used the term - *dharam yudh* -- campaign for righteousness -- I have no other desire except to wage a campaign for righteous values in our living.²⁰

JUSTICE

In *jap ji* is said - perfect are Thy laws/ justice and dispensation, perfect Thy scale of justice and those You honor²¹ Again Guru Amar Das says such is the Greatness of the Lord; His justice is totally Righteous.²² Guru Arjan also says righteous justice is ever dispensed in His Court.²³

The concept of divine justice is also enshrined in the word *dharam*. Dharam Rai, the mythical judge in God's court, uses *dharam* as his scale of justice. There are frequent references to

16. *mane dharam seti sanbandh* - M I Japji.

17. *dhaul dharam daya ka poot santokh thap rakheya jin soot* - Japji pauri 16.

18. *dharam karaey karam dhurui furmaya* - Malar M II, p. 1280.

19. *saram dharam doey nanaka jo dhan palley paaye* - Malar M I, p. 1287.

20. *avar vashina nehi mohey dharam yudh ko chap*.

21. *amul dharam amul deeban, amul tul amul parwan* -- Japji pauri 26.

22. *har ki vadeayi vadi hai ja niaon hai dharam ka* - Sri Rag M III, p. 84.

23. *sada dharam ja key deeban* - M V, p. 987.

this divine function in the scripture. For instance Guru Angad says O Nanak, having created the beings, the Lord installed the righteous judge of *Dharam* to read and record their accounts.²⁴

HONESTY

In this verse Bhai Gurdas has used the word *dharmā* to convey the meaning of honesty - serve the needy only using savings from honest earnings.²⁵

MERIT

In another verse the term implies merit - O Nanak, whoever gives to them [the wandering mendicants], earns the same kind of merit.²⁶

The broad core meanings and dimensions of *dharam* in different contextual settings emerging from the limited sample presented include persuasion/faith, code of conduct, duty/role, balancing/harmonizing force, righteousness, justice, honesty and merit.

RELATED ATTRIBUTES

We also find that some other attributes are often mentioned in association with *dharmā*, suggesting the range of related factors that bear on its core concept. Witness the following:

- Purity, contentment, compassion, faith and truthfulness – I have ushered these into the home of my self.²⁷
- The Lord's servant sings God's praises as worship, meditation, self-discipline and religious observances.²⁸
- The mother of the Guru's persuasion is wisdom and contentment the father; through whom one attains

24. *nanak jio upaey key likh naavai dharam bahaleya* - M II, p. 463.

25. *kirt virt kar dharam di khat khavalan kaar krehi* - Vaar: 1 Pauree 3.

26. *tin ke ditey nanaka teho jiha dharam* - Salok Vaaraan Te Vadheek M III, p. 1413.

27. *sat santokh daya dharam sach eh apne greh bheetar vaarey* - Asa M V, p. 379.

28. *jap tap sanjam karam dharam har kirtan jan gaaeyo* - Gujri M V, p. 498.

deliverance. Forbearance and the sense of duty are its brothers, and meditation, austerities, continence the sons.²⁹

One may thus infer that virtues and qualities such as purity, contentment, compassion, truthfulness, self-restraint, forbearance, austerity, continence, as well as prayerful, meditative disposition and refined intellect [wisdom], control of evil propensities and well directed personal will along with *dharam*, in its multi-dimensional meaning, form the paradigm that informs a person's propensities for action choices and thus his potential for spiritual advancement.

DHARAM THROUGH THE AGES

There is another commentary on *dharam* that may be considered now. Traditionally we believe that the world has passed through three ages and we are currently living through *kaljug*, the fourth age. Guru Nanak says in Sat Yuga, contentment was the chariot [human disposition] and *dharam* the charioteer [lead instinct, social ethos].³⁰ Through the ages there is transition of human disposition from a state of contentment to flaming desire and the lead human instinct or social ethos from *dharmic* motivation to falsehood – both progressive erosion.

Transition in values and human behavior through the ages is envisioned by Guru Amar Das in these words - In Sat Yuga, everyone spoke the truth and devotional worship was performed in each and every home - - In Traytaa Yuga - -hypocrisy became prevalent, and people thought that the Lord was far away. - - In Dwaapur Yuga, deluded by doubt people became torn by duality. - - [In Kalyug] Love of and attachment to *maya* has brought total darkness.³¹

29. *gurmat mata mat hai pita santokh mokh pad paaiya, dheeraj dharam bharav doey japtap jatsat put janaeya* - Vaar: 6 Pauree 5.

30. *satjug rath santokh ka dharam agey rathvahu* - Asa M I, p. 470.

31. *satjug sach kahe sabh koi, ghar ghar bhagat gurmukh hoi, — tretay — pakhand varteya har jaanan dur — duapar doojey dubhida hoey, bharam bhulane jaaneh doey — maya moh ati gubaar* - Ramkali M III, p. 880.

What we gather being said is that, over time, the people's disposition has changed from contentment to flaming desire. Falsehood is the new social ethos from *dharm* of early ages. Instead of devotional worship, god of mammon has become important and debate and argument get precedence over true knowledge. Evidently man's spiritual progression, linked to his living by *dharm*, will be influenced by his awareness of true knowledge and balance in his value package.

MAN'S SPIRITUAL ASCENT – TO DHUR

Now if we go back to the quote from *jap ji* regarding *dharti dharamsal*, we find that the context is the description of the stages of spiritual ascent by man. The description in the quote was of *dharam khand*, the realm of *dharam*, seen as the first stage in the soul's progress to its source. The Guru has named the next higher plane as *gyan khand*, the realm of knowledge followed by *saram khand*, the realm of aesthetics and ecstasy, then *karam khand*, the realm of Grace and finally *sach khand*, the realm of Truth where the True One resides.

DHARAM KHAND

In the hierarchy of stages of spiritual progress Nanak considered *dharam khand* as the first step in man's ascent on the spiritual path. In this paradigm the human actions –*karam*– are the critical determinants of how humans are judged. The *karmic* law basically envisages that actions and experiences in one life influence future lives. All actions have causes and therefore in turn they entail consequences. The action is not only a physical act; even a thought, word or deed, known or unknown is a form of action. So is inaction because understandably it is the result of a deliberate choice made by the individual. On its own, any *karam* is neither good nor bad; it is deemed virtuous or sinful depending on the motivation behind each action.

In this phase man is busy carrying out the functions assigned by the Creator as well as his mundane obligations. Placed in the diverse and complex setting of the creation, man's choice

of actions will be influenced by his understanding of *dharmā* and ability of his consciousness to choose between the right and wrong, good and bad. Those whose performance is acceptable and who are bestowed God's grace will be received with honor while others will continue through cycles of birth and death.

GYAN KHAND

In this progression the next level is *gyan khand*. That – *gyan* – is not just a reflection of one's education or learning is stressed. Nanak says that mere reading and writing without an understanding of the inner reality may only reinforce doubts.³² In fact being overly worldly wise may only ensure continued cycle of transmigration.³³ Awareness of this kind cannot be obtained by effort alone. Real knowledge and understanding of phenomenal world and induction to divine spirit comes only through the help, teaching and guidance of the Guru.³⁴

The awareness of man in this stage broadens to develop an understanding of the larger canvas of multiple persuasions, schools of thought, sages, seers, worlds beyond our own and the play of knowledge in the variety of personalities and precepts. In fact the man's conscious is now sensitized enough to receive the enrapturing celestial melodies and sights. Knowledge, reason and wisdom now hold supreme.³⁵

The effectual essence of development to this stage is that the human comprehension, intellect and reason further help the man to stay the course of *dharmā*. The sense of duality is departed, desires are tempered and the inclusive understanding developed further refines man's attitude and responses and enhances his inclination for virtuous activity. The choice determinants now being the understanding of *dharmā* at the

32. *likh likh padēya teta karheya* – M I, p. 467.

33. *boht sianap aavey jāey* – Dhanasri M I, p.686.

34. *satgur vituh vareya jit miliye khasam samaya, jin kar updes gyan anjan diya inni netri jagat nehaleya* M I, Pauri p. 470.

35. *gyan khand mehn gyan parchand* – Jap ji, Pauri 36.

person's elevated plane of knowledge and reason are likely to lead to actions that may be more acceptable in God's court.

SARAM KHAND

In the realm of *saram khand* the all-pervasive attribute is beauty and harmony. By this stage the understanding, insight and intuition of the man are so developed that he is empathetically sensitized to start perceiving the ineffable wondrous beauty, harmony and balance in the creation. This is the level of consciousness of seers and angels who can relate to their contemporaneous settings in a state of harmony.

Nanak has himself expressed his state of bliss and wonderment beholding the various phenomenon and experiences in his compositions - the cosmic melodies; the divine wisdom; the creatures, their species and animals prancing around naked; the hues and forms of creation; the air currents, water and playful flames of fire; the earth, its resources and attractions; the emotion of union, separation; hunger and satiation; distance, closeness and togetherness; wilderness and clear paths. He concludes by saying how wonderstruck is he to see God's astounding marvels and how truly blessed are those who get a glimpse of His mysteries. [Slok M I, p. 463].

When in this realm, the man's heart is totally subsumed with love. He is in a state of inner peace and harmony. He is not inimical to or overly attached to any body or any thing. He is in a state of bliss and thankful for God's benevolence.

Persons at this level of awareness are truly God oriented and focused on altruistic activities. Their actions, thoughts and choices now are rooted in their holistic understanding of *dharam* and thus would meet the criteria for favorable disposition in God's court. They have ascended to the level of *gurmukh*, *brahm gyani*, *khalsa*, *sant sipahi*.

KARAM KHAND

The elevation to *karam khand* brings to end the cycle of birth and death. One reaches this door of deliverance only by God's

grace - effort and spiritual evolution is needed but by itself is not enough. The Gurus emphasize that even if one were to live for ages, earn a good name and praise from their fellow beings, the person may not get any recognition in His court unless the person is blessed with God's grace.³⁶

The key to be blessed with Grace is the person's spiritual intensity - total involvement with *naam*. Abiding in this realm are the heroic [men] and gracious [women] whose [brave] hearts are totally and firmly imbued with the love of the Lord. Valiance is a quality associated with the spiritually developed.³⁷ Also spiritual progression is seen as a struggle against evil propensities and success is viewed akin to victory in battle. Those in this stage have no fear and enjoy a constant state of bliss - *anand*, *vismad*. Such grace may descend on some even while alive; a state named *jivan mukta*. Such a person lives completely submerged in *nam*, content with God's will.

SACH KHAND

The abode of God is *sach khand*, *dhur*. Residing here God joyfully looks at His creation; takes care of it; makes it operate as He wills; orders the lives and actions of beings and is happy with what He sees and does. It is an indescribable firmament of countless worlds, regions, and forms. The entire creation is in His bounteous grace and He dispenses Divine justice from here. It is far or near depending upon where we are for God is indeed very close to us if only we have reached the stage where we can connect with His immanent presence. In fact says the Guru the dear Lord has fashioned the body as His temple and dear folks, the Lord continues to dwell there.³⁸

36. *je jug chare arja hor dosuni hoe, nava khandan vich jaaniai naal chale sab koe, changa nao rakhae ke jas kirat jag le, je tis nadar na aaveyi tan vaat na puchhe ke* - M I p. 2.

37. *'ja ko har ras laga iss jug mein so kahiye hai soora* - Dhanasri M V p.679.

38. *har mandar har jio sajeya mere lal jio har is meh rehya samaey ram* - Bihagra M V, p.542.

THE GURU'S WAY

Guru Amardas in a composition elucidates what the *dharam* of this age [Kalyug] may entail - Learn thus the *dharam* of this age, my brothers, that the essence of all the learning from the Perfect Guru is that both here and hereafter, the Lord's Name will be your companion. [Therefore] learn of the Lord, contemplate on Him, for then, by Guru's Grace, your impurities will be cleansed. God cannot be found through argument and debate; propensity for duality only dulls the mind and body. Attune yourself to the true Lord through His *shabad*. The world is polluted by - *haumain* -, which is not washed away by frequent dips at sacred places. Without reaching God's presence, there is no liberation but only torture of death. Blessed are those who imbibe humility and through the *shabad* conquer their ego for they will overcome the five [evil instincts] and achieve liberation for themselves and those around them.³⁹

The Sikh precepts are built to guide the believer to be able to strive for spiritual ascent while living self-supporting, sharing, prayerful life, lived in the midst of and with other people, in a communal setting notwithstanding the constraints that an average working person living in real time, in the midst of real people, handling real situations and facing real challenges encounters in life.

The path to merge with the Lord is open to all. There is no distinction based on caste in God's court nor are women excluded. No one persuasion is supreme: Those who follow another persuasion are not gentile, *malechh* or *kafir* - all are His children. Our action choices should meet societal obligations and be in sync with God's will. In other words our endeavor should be to be good persons of faith and live a moral, ethical

39. *is jag ka dharam padhau tum bhai, poorey gur sabh sojhi paayi, aithey agey har nam sakhai, ram padho man karo beechar, gur parsadi mail utaar, rahau, vaad virodh neh paaya jaey, man tan pheeka doojey bhaey, gur ke sabad sach liv laey, haumain maila eh sansara, nit teerath naaveh neh jaey ahankara, bin gur bhetey jam karey khuara, sau jan sachu jeh haumai maarey, gur keh sabad panch sangharey, aap tarey sagle kul tarey* - Gauri M III, p.230.

and prayerful life. Observing rituals, practicing austerities or performing pilgrimages is not an index of spiritual progression or enough for deliverance.

Do not shy away from taking righteous position. Don't elect the option of inaction in the face of coercion, tyranny, and exploitation. Strive for removal of injustice, discrimination and exploitation especially of the weak and the under privileged.

Love is important to achieve unity with God. One cannot even think of freedom from transmigration without love of the Lord in his heart.⁴⁰ If one really and strongly loves God, search the *shabad* for the way. Search, reason, reflection and faith are key that, with love in one's heart, will open up the mysteries of bliss, *anand*. Love is high, very high, for the enlightened person seeks, not worldly possessions or even otherworldly release, but only the yearning in his heart for God's lotus feet.

Never be short on endeavor and retain sense of optimism - *chardi kala*- spurred by the belief that God wants the good of all. Understand that no one can fathom His ways and keep faith that if one serves His will, he will be blessed with His grace. Good *karam* are not wasted they provide the hope for being blessed with human incarnation, possible glimmer of another chance. Seek Guru's guidance - the source is Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the living Guru, for one can be saved from the consequences of one's *karam* if one completely surrenders to the Guru. The path the Guru has shown embodies universal values - living life naturally as God intended; in harmony with the rest of humanity and God's creation; no denials and austerities; an ethical, productive life lived in its fullness sharing, in thankfulness and love, the rewards that honest labor brings. Guru Arjan seems to sum it up saying - *nanak satgur bhetiye poori hovai jugat, hasandeya, khelandeya, painandeya, khavandeya viche hovai mukt* - meeting the true Guru, O Nanak, one is shown the way to achieve liberation even as one lives a

40. *man re kiyon chhute bin pyar* - M I p.60.

participating life: laughing, playing, wearing finery and imbibing delicacies. [Gujri M V, p. 522]

SPIRITUAL PROGRESSION-KNOWLEDGE MATRIX

In order to facilitate comprehension of the spiritual progression inherent in the five stages discussed earlier I have attempted a knowledge matrix reflective of various stages. I must admit that, not being blessed with deeper understanding, I had to use this device routed in reason to try and develop my own understanding. I am appending the matrix at the end with the hope that it catalyses further deliberation and considered learned comments help bring greater clarity to our understanding of the Guru's multi dimensional, holistic vision of human spiritual quest.

Stage or Khand	Knowledge Type	Source of Learning	Stage of Mental Development	<i>Haumain</i> Disposition
Dharma	Received, perceived, customary or conventional	Instincts & experience of empirical world	Aware of hukam, variety, diversity	Self interest driven
Gyan	Acquired, learnt, cognitive	Search, seek conceptual world through reason, intellect and open mind	Experience higher truths & understand inter connectedness	Controlled through sensitivity about others
Saram	Contemplative, reflective, thought, felt, aesthetic	Effort at inner withdrawal to contemplate & reflect on spiritual world	Consciousness molded to comprehend innate beauty, harmony in creation	Subdued by the surge of goodwill for all
Karam	Metaphysical, Immediate, Internalized, transcends human reason, action	Intuitive insight through God's Grace	Energized by bliss and balance	Exhuned, by spirit of service to God's purpose
Sach	Divine, Revelatory, Truth, integrative, apex	Directly from Creative Spirit	Understand how divine will works - hukam	Merges with & surrenders to God's will

Trishna Disposition	Mode of Interface with the Creation	Social Orientation	Response to Societal ills
Driver	Interactive, tribal, self centered	Protective self preservation, competitive	Reactive, defensive
Reasoned level thru frugality, austerity, choice	Inclusive, empathetic, friendly	Acceptance of diversity and variety in creation & its significance	Rational, measured, corrective, justice seeking
Contented with what God gives	Joyful, ecstatic, fraternal, appreciative	Appreciation of balance, beauty and harmony in diversity & variety	Righteous, proactive, sensitive to other's cause
Sharing, caring, giving	Altruistic, helping, serving, nurturing	Treat all variety & diversity stemming from one source	Willing to sacrifice to protect the weak & oppressed
Providing	Seeing Divine light in all	None stranger or enemy, love for all	Not afraid ready to give life for peace & justice

THE KUL CONNECTION

ASSOCIATE MULTIPLIER IN PRAYERFUL LIVING

Sikh thought is very proactive about societal and fraternal relations of a devotee. Spiritual development is seen linked to *sat sangat* – association of seekers of truth. This is not only commended for congregational worship. The society that a devotee keeps also determines how the person may develop spiritually. The *slok* at the conclusion of Japji says that *jinni nam dhai-ayya gaye musakat ghaal, nanak te mukh ujlai keti chhutti naal'* – the endeavor of those who meditated on Divine name is approved. Not only are they liberated but also liberated are those who were associated with them.

The same strand of thought finds expression in a different way using the metaphor of *kul* several times in the Guru's writings. The expression *aap tarai saglai kul tarai* – not only are they saved but they also save their entire family – appears in various verses twenty times or more. The Guru's intent seems to be to convey the message unambiguously and they repeat it to be emphasized. One can read into this message the simplistic thought that liberation might come because those around you are virtuous and you will be carried across with the current. This would counter the persuasion for spiritual endeavor. We will try to explore the various facets of this hopeful message as it transpires from the Guru Granth Sahib.

AAP TARAI SAGLAI KUL TAARAI

There are two operative words in the subject verse – *taarai* and *kul*. The word *taarai* is derived from *taarnaa* which means

to cause or help to swim; to carry one across the river of existence; to liberate from the cycle of birth and death; save or deliver from sin. The literal meaning of the word *kul* is lineage, line, dynasty, descent, ancestry, pedigree, family, house; caste, tribe, race.¹

In Gurbani the life experience is seen akin to crossing a dangerous ocean to connect with the Divine and the word *taarna* and its various derivative forms have been used invariably to convey the metaphor of liberating or helping to swim across *bhavsagar* or *bhavjal* – the ocean of existence or the chasm spanning the divide between the divine and the mundane. In this crossing Guru helps but the individual has to make the effort.

The opposite of *taarna* is *dobnaa* – causing to drown or continue in birth and death cycle. The use of term drowning is in that context and means those who fail to cross the ocean. For them there is no liberation. They continue in the process of reincarnation. We will encounter this word later in our discussion.

The word *kul* has been translated in Gurbani² to mean all generations³, all ancestors⁴ and all family⁵ in three same/similar verses that I picked. All these verses carry the message that [such a person] saves himself and also his family. The translated meanings fit in with their context and seem appropriate. If we look further Bhagat Ravidas includes families of both parents obviating thinking of *kul* as going back along patriarchal [or matriarical] lineage only.⁶ Other verses include friends and companions as beneficiaries - witness 'She saves herself, and saves her family and friends as well'⁷ and 'I myself am liberated,

1. Lieral meanings from Punjabi-English Dictionary, Patiala, 1999.

2. For the purpose of this discussion I am going by the on line translated text on the more popular sites like Sikhi to the Max and Gateway to Sikhism.

3. *aap tharai sagalae kul thaarai* – Dhanasri M I, p. 662.

4. *aap tharehi sagalae kul thaarae* – Majh M III, p. 117.

5. *aap tharai sagalae kul oudhhaaraa* – Gauri Guareri M III, p. 160.

6. *hoee puneeth bhagavanth bhajan thae aap thaar thaarae kul dhoe* – Bilaval Ravidas, p. 858.

7. *aap tharai sangath kul thaarai* – Asa M I, p. 353.

and my companions swim across; my family and ancestors are also saved'.⁸ There is no suggestion that the benefit may extend to the racial, tribal or caste grouping but the circle of those saved may transcend such divides to include the entire creation swimming across with them in addition to family.⁹

The concept of kul thus seems to extend to family, family of parents, relations, ancestors, future generations, friends, companions and even the world around the person blessed by divine grace. This surely is a great testimonial for the virtuous but we want to explore as we go forward if the spin off for those around as above is unqualified or do they have to meet some expectations to be worthy of this reflected benefit.

HOW TO SAVE SELF & KUL

Total surrender to God and acceptance of Divine will through seeking sanctuary of Akal Purkh is commended. In this state of submission the individual submerges his sense of self in the higher self through total surrender, love and devotion thus earning the promise of liberation for the individual as also all their ancestors.¹⁰

The Gurmukhs¹¹ live a prayerful, righteous life and are liberated. Such spiritually evolved persons are commended

8. *aap mukath sangee tharae kul kuttanb oudhhaarae* – Bilaval M V, p. 814.

9. *oue aap tharae srisatt sabh thaaree sabh kul bhee paar paeiaa* – Malar M IV, p. 1264.

10. *aap tharehi sagalae kul thaarehi jo thaaree saranaae* – Bhairon M III, p. 1155.

11. Gurmukhs are Guru oriented persons. Though usually the term has been used to convey the sense of those who have belief in Sikh Gurus' thought, it is not necessarily restricted to that e.g. Prahlada meditated on God as Gurmukh and was saved. Janak as Gurmukh lovingly centered his consciousness on Naam. Vashisht spread divine teachings as Gurmukh. No one has found Naam, my brethren without the Guru for devotion is a blessing bestowed on a Gurmukh - *guramukh prehilaadh jap har gath paaee guramukh janak har naam liv laaee guramukh basisatt har oupadhaes sunaee bin gur har naam n kinai paaeiaa maerne bhaaee guramukh har bhagath har aap lehaae* – Wadhans M III, p. 591. In Japji also Guru Nanak says – *gurmukh nadang gurmukh vedang, gurmukh rehya sammaee*.

strongly by the Guru as exemplars and Gurmukh chanting Naam is redeeming for the individual as also all their families and ancestors.¹²

Those who serve the true Guru are recognized as the greatest people of the world. Serving the Guru translates into prayerful life serving God's purposes. Keeping Naam clasped tightly to their hearts they cross over the terrifying world-ocean. They save themselves, and redeem their generations.¹³ The important thing is to follow the Guru's teachings, live by them and enshrine the Divine within one's conscious.¹⁴

Those who chant are sanctified. Those who listen are blessed, and those who write save their ancestors. Those who join *saadh sangat*, company of the seekers, are imbued with God's Love; they reflect and meditate on Him. God has showered His mercy upon them and blessed them to dwell on His praises. Contemplating God, their lives are reformed and they no longer have to wander in the cycles of birth and death.¹⁵ Singing glories of and meditating on God the devotee crosses over the ocean of sin, and saves all his generations as well.¹⁶

This terrifying world ocean is also alluded to all that is transitory - *maya*. The mortal gets entangled in its numerous attractions and their pursuit. It is through the *Shabad* that a

12. *aap tharai kul sagalae thaarae guramukh janam savaaranai* - Majh M III, p. 125; *guramukh hovai raam naam vakhaanai aap tharai kul thaarae* - Gauri M III, p. 246.

13. *satgur saevah se mehapurkh sansarae aap udharae kul sagal nisatarae har kaa naam rakhehi our dhaarae naam rathae bhoulal utarehi paarae* - Gauri Guareri M III, p. 161.

14. *gurmatee jagajeevan man vasai sabh kul udhaaranehaar* - Maru M I, p. 1009.

15. *kehatae pavitr sunatae sabh dhann likhatya kul taria jeo jin ko saadhoo sa(n)g naam har ra(n)g thinee breham beechaariaa jeeo breham beechaariaa janam savaariaa pooran kirapaa prabh karee kar gehi leenae har jaso dheenae jon naa dhhaavai neh maree* - Sri Rag M V, p. 81.

16. *prabh gun gaae bikhai ban thariaa kuleh samooh oudhhaariou* - Devghandhari M V, p. 534; *simar suaamee antharajaamee kul samoohaa sabh tharae* - Ramkali M V, p. 928.

true hermit is able to overcome this attachment while still living a normal life and achieve liberation for self and his ancestors. Such persons wash away pollution within; they serve up truth and remain dead [to worldly attachment] while alive.¹⁷

Divine grace is important for this to happen. Blessed is the one who God unites with the true Guru. Blessed also is the one who receives grace of the saintly. They are freed from worldly attachment - all their generations are saved.¹⁸

BLESSED THEIR MOTHER, FATHER; BLESSED THEIR COMING

Such exemplars that have a catalytic effect in spiritual transformation of others are indeed blessed and the Gurus have a lot of praise for them, their parents and the Guru who helps to put the devotee onto the virtuous path and guides along the way.

Blessed are the mothers who give birth to the virtuous who live by and put others on the path of righteousness. They save themselves, their families are saved, relatives liberated, ancestors redeemed and they even become saviors of the whole world.¹⁹

Those whose minds are pleased by the praises of Har, Har, are joyful in their own homes. As they sing God's praises it is like they savor sweet delicacies. Such meek devotees save their families for twenty-one generations and they save the entire world!²⁰

17. *maaeiaa mohu bhavajal hai avadhoo sabadh tharai kul thaaree* - Ramkali M I, p. 908; *vichahu mal kattae aapanee kulaa kaa karae oudhhaar* - Maru M III, p. 1087; *sangath kul tharaae saach pareesehi* - Maru M I, p. 1025; *jeevath marai sabh kul oudhharai* - Basant M III, p. 1170.

18. *jis maelehi sathigur aap this kae sabh kul tharaa* - Maru M V, p. 1096; *santh prasaadh tharae kul logaa naanak lipath n maeiou* - Kanra M V, p. 1299.

19. *kul udharae apanaa dhann janaedee maeiaa* - Majh M II, p. 138; *aap thariaa kul jagath tharaaeiaa dhann janaedhee maeiaa* - Gujri ki Var, M III, p. 513.

20. *mandar ghar aanand har har jas man bhaavai sabh ras meethae mukh lagehi jaa har gun gaavai har jan parvaar sadhhaar hai eikeeh kulee sabh jagat chhaddaavai* - Gauree Bairaagan M IV, p. 165.

If children are told stories²¹ of their heritage they learn good ways. They accept what is pleasing to the true Guru and live accordingly. As said, in Simritees and Shaastras and the writings of Vyaas, Suk Dayv, Naarad²² and others who preached to the world, those who God attaches are attached to truth and contemplate Naam forever. O Nanak, their coming into the world is approved; they redeem all their ancestors.²³

Rare are those who contemplate word of the Guru [Shabad], and remain detached. They save themselves, and save all their associates and ancestors; fruitful is their birth and coming into this world.²⁴

Guru shows the way. Without Guru there is no hope of any spiritual progress. Doubly blessed therefore are the father, the family and the mother, who gave birth to the Guru.²⁵

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21. story telling tradition has the purpose of sharing religious wisdom, challenging the listener and talking of followers and teachers of the faith. Unlike reading sacred texts, kirtan, offerings et al that glorify, praise and thank God such discourses fall in the genre of preaching rather than worship. This mode – katha - is a tool for teaching history and beliefs to the devotees and is practiced in all faiths in slightly varying formats. As an addendum to worship [sing/pray one's way to God] this mode may help think, consider and reflect one's way to God.
 22. Vyas, Sukhdev and Narad were great sages. Sukhdev son of Vyas, a Brahmin, was a disciple of King Janak of Mithila who was respected for his eminent spiritual attainments. Narad is said to know everything that transpires in the three worlds [earth, space above and below] and a great preceptor. In mythology he is depicted conveying messages and creating discord between gods and men.
 23. *baabaania kehaania put saput karaen j̄ śātigur bhaavai s mann lain saee karam karaen jaae puchhau simrit saasat bīas suk-naarad bachan sabh srisatt karaen sachai laaeae sach lagae sadhaa sach samaalaen naanak aaeae sae paravaan bheae j sagalae kul taaraen* - Ramkali Slok M III, p. 951.
 24. *aisae jan viralae sansaarae gur sabadh veechaarehi rehehi piraarae aap tharehi sangath kul thaarehi thin safal janam jag aaeiaa* - Maru M I, p. 1039.
 25. *dhan dhann pitaa dhhan dhann kul dhhan dhhan s jananee jin guroo janiaa mae* - Gauri M IV, p. 310.

SAVE FOR 21 GENERATIONS

The blessing of saving the future generations is intended to be lasting. The Gurus have in a couple of cases put a number on it – twenty-one generations. Though this number may in fact only be a metaphor for conveying the extended beneficence that one good life may bring to his/her succeeding generations nonetheless emphasis by the Gurus on the good that such lives may do is quite clear.

Bhagat Prahlad who was steadfast in his belief of one God was saved from being killed by divine intervention. The mythology has it that because of his resolute devotion his coming twenty-one generations were blessed with liberation. Guru says 'following his Guru's instructions child Prahlad²⁶ only chanted God's name. His teachers Sandaa and Markaa²⁷ went to his father the king, and complained that Prahlad has gone astray and is leading other pupils astray. At this the king planned to scare Prahlad into submission. He with sword in hand, and in great pride ran up to his son and shouted, "Where is your God, who will save you?" Seeing this as a test of Prahlad's, his mother advised her son not to abandon God's name to save his life. Prahlad assured his mother that he would never give up his Guru's teaching. In an instant, God appeared in a dreadful form, shattered the pillar and tore Harnaakash [the father/king] apart by His claws. Prahlad was saved. God always helps the Saints in their righteous pusesuits. He saved Prahlad and blessed twenty-one generations

26. Prahlad was son of Harnakash, a demon king, who wanted to be worshipped by his subjects. He however was a staunch devotee of Vishnu, also identified with the Supreme Being, and did not succumb to intense threats and pressure to give up his beliefs. Prahlad's steadfastness to one God has been lauded in Guru Granth Sahib and story of his trials and tribulations has also been detailed in Bhairon M III, p. 1154. There also are numerous other references to him.

27. Teachers assigned by Prahlad's father to teach him but Prahlad refused to learn anything except Naam.

of Prahlad's descendents with liberation.'²⁸

At another place says Guru Ram Das 'God's humble servants are saviors of their families saving them for twenty-one generations and also save the entire world.'²⁹

EXAMPLES OF THOSE SAVED

The blessing of being saved is not restricted to any specially privileged persons. Guru Arjan says 'O True Guru, Your Word saves even the worthless. In your company the most argumentative, vicious and indecent people, have been purified and families of those who were destined to wander in reincarnation and consigned to hell have been redeemed. Those whom no one knew and no one respected have become known and respected at His Court.'³⁰

The five-year-old orphan boy Dhroo³¹ due to his devotional

28. *maeree patteeaa likhahu har govi(n)dh gopaalaa dhoojai bhaae faatlhae jam jaalaa sathigur karae maeree prathipaalaa har sukhadhaathaa maerai naalaa gur oupadhaes prehilaadh har oucharai saasanaa thae baalak gam n karai maathaa oupadhaesai prehilaadh piaarae puthr raam naam shhoddahu jeeo laehu oubaarae prehilaadh kehahi sunahu maeree maae raam naam n shhoddaa gur dheaa bujhaae sa(n)ddaa marakaa sabh jae pukaarae prehilaadh aap vigarriaa sabh chaattarrae vigaarrae dhusatt sabhaa mehi ma(n)thra pakaaeiaa prehilaadh kaa raakhaa hoe raghuraaeiaa haathh kharrag kar dhhaaeiaa ath aha(n)kaar har thaeraa kehaa thujh leae oubaar khin mehi bhaiaan roop nikasiaa thha(n)mh oupaarr haranaakhas nakhee bidhaariaa prehilaadh leea oubaar sa(n)th janaa kae har jeeo kaaraj savaarae prehilaadh jan kae eikeeh kul oudhhaarae - Bhairon M III, p. 1133.*

29. *har jan paravaar sadhhaar hai eikeeh kulee sabh jagath shhaddaavai - Gauri Bairagan M IV, p. 166.*

30. *satgur bachan tumhaarae nirgun nisataarae mehaa bikhaadhee dhusatt apavaadhee thae puneeth sa(n)gaarae janam bhava(n)thae narak parra(n)thae thinh kae kul oudhhaarae koe n jaanae koe n maanae sae paragat har duaarae - Raag Aasaa M V, p. 406.*

31. Dhru was the son of king Uttanpada off his wife Suniti. Suruchi the other wife of the king was the favored one and once reproved Dhruv as a child on insisting on sitting in the lap of his father. Disconsolate, Dhruv went to his mother who told him the real accomplishment would be to connect with the Divine. Dhru left home, perchance met Narada who instructed him on devotional worship. Dhru's devotion is said to have been approved and he was given the status of Pole Star, called Dhru in Indian mythology.

meditation of God received the blessing of a fixed and eternal position in the firmament as pole star. Faced with death Ajaamal³² called out Narayan – his son's name but also name for God. Hearing his call, God appeared and struck down the messenger of death thus saving Ajamal. Baalmeek the outcaste was saved, and the poor hunter was saved as well. The elephant [who otherwise is said to be motivated by lust] only momentarily remembered God and was carried across. God saved Prahlad and tore Harnakash with his nails. Bidar, the son of a slave-girl, was purified, and all his generations were redeemed. My Master has saved countless beings.³³

Vibrating and meditating on Har, who has not been carried across? In company of the holy, sadh sangat, those born as birds, fish, deer, bulls et al are saved. Pain of those who meditate and vibrate on God in saadh sangat is taken away and families of gods, demons, titans, celestial singers and human beings are carried across the ocean.³⁴

The Lord's servant, although of lowly birth, is exalted. Associating with him, one obtains the fruits of his mind's desires.³⁵

32. Ajamal born a Brahmin fell in love with and married a shudra woman. He lived an evil and dissipated life. Old, he was accosted by Yamdoot when scared he called out Narayan, his son – also a name God is known by. God intervened at his call and his life was spared. He instantly transformed, gave up all vices and was liberated.

33. *paanch barakh ko anaath dhroo baarik har simarat amar attarae putr haet naaraein kehio jamaka(n)kar maar bidhaarae maerae t(h)aakur kaethae aganath oudhhaarae mohi dheen alap math niragun pariou saran dhuaarae baalameek supachaaro thariou badhiik tharae bichaarae eaek nimakh man maahi araadhio gajapath paar outhaarae keenee rakhiia bhagath prehilaadhai haranaakhas nakhahi bidhaarae bidhar dhaasee suth. bhaeio puneeethaa sagalae kul oujaarae* - Maru M V, p. 999.

34. *har kai bhajan koun koun n thaarae khaag than meen than mrig than baraah than saadhho sa(n)g oudhhaarae dhaev kul dhaith kul jakhy ki(n)nar nar saagar utarae paarae jo jo bhajan karai saadhho sa(n)g thaa kae dhookh bidhaarae* - Malar M V, p. 1269.

35. *har kaa daas neech kul oochaa tis sang man baanshhat fal paaeiaa* - Gujri M V, p. 497.

The litany of those saved thus is broad – seems none is excluded; low, high; young, old; celestial beings, men, animals – as long as they experienced spiritual transformation and were purified through personal endeavor or inspired by closeness to the virtuous. The dividend distribution however seems to have some riders. Let us see some conditions that may lead to drowning self and others rather than saving or helping them swim across the life ocean.

THOSE WHO DROWN

Those who turn their backs on God their families are stained with disgrace.³⁶ Those who forget Naam their family is sterile, barren, dishonored and mother made a widow. They drown themselves, and their entire family; speaking lies, they eat poison³⁷ - lies being the opposite of true, eternal, abiding reality. In other words those who deny the existence of, disown or forget God bring such curse and dishonor to their families.

Those engrossed in duality and who forget Guru's Shabad are always beset with hunger and thirst [of desire]. They wander around burning [never at peace]. Those who befriend the wicked and harbor animosity to the saintly shall drown with their families. Their entire lineage shall be obliterated.³⁸

Slandering others, they drown themselves, and drown all their generations as well.³⁹

If a servant runs away when his master is in trouble, he brings shame to all his family and he will not have a long life. I shall not abandon Your devotional worship even if people

36. *jo baemukh gobindh thae piaarae thin kul laagai gaal* – Sorath M V, p. 641.

37. *aap ddubae sagalae kul ddobae koorr bol bikh khaavaniaa* – Majh M III, p. 124; *jin aisaa naam visaariaa maeraa har har this kai kul laagee gaaree har this kai kul parasooth n kareehu this bidhhavaa kar mehatlaaree* – Malar M IV, p. 1263.

38. *gur kaa sabadh visaarya doojai bhaae rachan tisanaa bhukh n utarai anadin jalat firan dusattaa naal dosatee naal santaa vair karan aap dubae kuttanb sio sagalae kul doban* – Suhi M III, p. 755.

39. *oue aap ddubae par nindhakaa sagalae kul ddobaen* – Ramkali M III, p. 951.

make fun of me [for being steadfast in your worship]. Your lotus feet abide within my heart.⁴⁰

The whole world is engrossed in corruption. This corruption has drowned entire families. O man, why have you wrecked your boat and sunk it? You have broken with the Lord, and joined hands with the corrupt. Angels and human beings alike are burning in the raging fire. The immaculate and pure water brought forth by constant contemplation and awareness is near at hand, but the beast does not drink it.⁴¹

That family, whose son has no spiritual wisdom or contemplation, why didn't his mother just become a widow? That man who has not practiced devotional worship, why didn't such a sinful man die at birth? So many pregnancies end in miscarriage, why was this one spared who lives his life in this world like a deformed and ugly person? Says Kabeer, without Naam beautiful and handsome people are nothing but images of ugliness.⁴²

Kabeer that family in which the Lord's slave is born is good; a family that does not bring forth Lord's slave is as useless as weeds.⁴³

Responsibility to family extends beyond being prayerful – one must also look and carry the self with dignity. Those look hideous, with their uncut hair matted and disheveled bring dishonor to their family and ancestry.⁴⁴

40. *saahib sankattavai saevak bhajai chirankaal n jeevai dhoo kul lajai thaeree bhagath n shhoddo bhaavai log hasai charan kamal maerae heearae basain* – Basant Namdev, p. 1195.

41. *bikhiaa bianaipaa sagal sansaar bikhiaa lai ddoobee paravaar rae nar naav chourr kath borree har sio thorr bikhiaa sang jorree sur nar dhaadhhae laagee aag nikatt neer pas peevas n jhaag chaethath chaethath nikasiou neer so jal niramal katlhath kabeer.*

42. *jih kul pooth n giaan beechari bidhavaa kas n bhee mehatari jih nar raam bhagat nehi saadhee janamat kas n muou aparaadhee much much garabhi gee keen bachiaa buddabhuj roop jeevae jag majhiaa kahu kabeer jaisae sundhar saroop naam binaa jaisae kubaj kuroop* - Gauri Kabir, p. 328. Gauri Kabir.

43. *kabeer soee kul bhalee jaa kul har ko dhaas jih kul dhaas n oopajai so kul dtaak palaas* – Salok Kabir, 111, p. 1370.

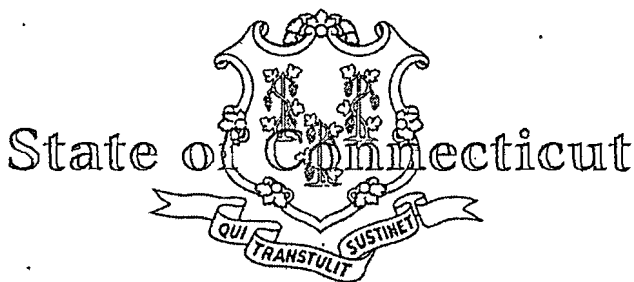
44. *eik jattaa bikatt bikaraal kul ghar khovehee* – Malar M III, p. 1284.

IN SUM

In sum then there is great benefit to be gained by joining the sangat. Surely there could be some who are more virtuous than several others and their association can be a catalyst for motivating those still wavering. But ritual joining of sangat has no meaning. It does not help - for the benefit of association can only flow if one is willing and ready to accept the Guru's teachings and live by them. That not happening the hope for being saved by mere being part of sangat is not likely to help. The examples of those who failed are eloquent in bringing that message home.

Let us therefore focus on our personal conduct even as we are part of the sangat. Our living should accord with Guru's teachings; not just in ritual prayer but devotion, thought and action. If that happens we will be able to connect with the Guru and association with the sangat will help. This is not unique for us. This is the criterion that the Gurus used in their lifetime too. The divine grace was bestowed on the deserving, or the serving, and not those who may have made a forceful claim. Satta and Balwand describe the choice of Lehna as successor by Guru Nanak in these words: 'Nanak proclaimed Lehna as his successor because he earned it — Nanak's sons turned their backs on him, as Guru and did not pay heed to his Word. Untrue of heart they became rebellious and earned loads of sin. Lehna obeyed and lived by whatever the Guru said. The Guru therefore installed him on the exalted position.'⁴⁵

45. *lehanae dhee faeraaeai naanaka dhohee khatteeai — puthree koul n paaliou kar peerahu ka(n)nh muratteeai dhil khottai aakee firanihi ba(n)nih bhaar ouchaeinih shhatteeai jin aakhee soee karne jin keethee thinae thhatteeai — Ramkali, Var Satta Balwand, p. 966.*



General Assembly
Official Citation

Introduced by Senator Kevin B. Sullivan of the 34th District

We it hereby known to all that:
The Connecticut Senate
hereby offers its sincerest congratulations to:

CONNECTICUT SIKH ASSOCIATION, GURU TEGH BAHADUR JI ASSOCIATION
AND THE SIKH FORUM OF CONNECTICUT
in recognition of

THE 400TH ANNIVERSARY OF INSTALLATION
OF THE HOLY SRI GURU GRANTH SAHIB,
THE SIKH SCRIPTURE.

The entire membership extends its
very best wishes on this memorable occasion
and expresses the hope for continued success.

Given this 14th day of September, 2004

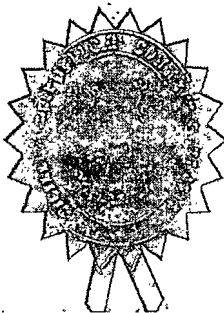
at the State Capitol

Hartford, Connecticut

by

[Signature]
President Pro Tempore

[Signature]
Secretary of the State



SONG, DANCE & SIKH WORSHIP

The motivation for my search comes from some experiences that I have had in our living in the US over the last two decades or so. When we came here Sikhs were not many – not that we are many now, but certainly our numbers have gone up and Sikhs have been moving from metropolitan areas into interior parts. It is therefore a common experience to find Sikhs in relatively small numbers in various parts of this huge country. All of them wherever they may be are motivated to establish a Gurdwara within relatively easy reach so that they can go there for worship, connect with the community and keep their kids in touch with Sikhi and Sikh heritage including language and culture.

In this process the initial problems faced by the community are many - the population densities are small; distances are daunting; resources available are extremely limited; cash resources are even less; there is hardly any intra-community communication or net-working; and there are not many who would undertake to bring the community together and do the massive leg work needed to launch and bring the project to fruition.

To maintain the Gurdwara Sikhs have to learn to do a lot of things by themselves. They may not be able to get or afford a Granthi or Ragis and have to find help from the sangat itself. They start with kirtan and langar and as their resources and management skills improve other services like katha, akhand path, simran, Sunday school teaching gurmukhi lipi, kirtan, sakhis and remembering some banis are progressively

added. However they soon discover that there is a need to organize and encourage community involvement in sports; arts, cultural activities; inter faith activities; media relations; social activism like human rights, women's rights, equality and justice; seeking political support; promoting involvement in political activism, volunteerism like helping with soup kitchens, food drives, environmental and eco justice issues and other issues problems like Sikh depiction in text books and educational curricula, their stereotyping and popular image related and other similar problems. These are not directly part of the religious service performed in the Gurdwaras but for all these activities a platform to communicate within is needed. If they want to have a cultural event they have not only to generate interest to organize it but possibly find performers from within.

If in this setting the Gurdwara faces pressure from some dogmatic activists who argue that Gurdwaras per tradition [maryada] must limit their activities to worship services as experienced by them in their life in India the community finds itself in a bind. At times it transpires that the dogmatists would not let any community related issues to be even announced in the Gurdwara; let alone the subject being deliberated upon or help being extended in facilitating its execution. The community then finds itself in a bind with little motivation or means to organize itself anew to handle such other needs.

The main problem that the community wrestles with is to stay in touch and keep the kids connected both to their faith tradition and cultural heritage. This often becomes a source of discord with the traditionalists decrying all cultural activities and taking the position that pursuit of music, song and dance are prohibited in Gurmat. We will try and explore this question a bit from Gurbani perspective to understand what the Gurus are saying.

MUSIC & SONG

As we are well aware Guru Granth Sahib is almost entirely set

to music. It is also known that the Gurus were great musicologists. There is also a widespread recognition that music was the mode preferred by all the bhagatas in the bhakti tradition. However the way spiritual music has been blended into Sikh worship is unique. From the way the rural folks gravitated in large numbers to hear the spiritual message of the Gurus one can only infer that the musical mode of its delivery did appeal to the people as much as catholicity of their teachings.

The Sikh tradition of kirtan began and had its initial development under the enlightened leadership of the Sikh Gurus. Guru Nanak would remain absorbed in meditation for hours and while he chanted God's praises, Mardana played on rebeck.¹ He was following God's command, said he.² Guru Angad had Mardana's sons as the minstrels as his ministry in Khadur became the second center of kirtan. Guru Amardas set up a center for kirtan at Goindwal where the morning and evening service was performed by Pandha and Boola. Guru Ramdas was very well versed in music. The city of Amritsar founded by him grew into the most important center of kirtan. He also introduced the variant –partal – in which the antras of the raga are sung to different taals. Guru Arjan introduced the tradition of kirtan sessions/sittings called chokis at Amritsar. Satta and Balwand were the court musicians. Thus professional musicians were the mainstay of kirtan service.

Tradition has it that at one time Satta and Balwand refused to perform kirtan in the hope of extracting some more monetary gain. Guru Arjan did not acquiesce and instead asked the members of congregation to learn to do kirtan. This encouraged the practice of devotional singing by laypersons using folk tunes. Even though Satta and Balwand later relented, the tradition of the laypersons performing kirtan continued alongside the professional singers. Guru Hargobind popularized the singing

1. Agnihotri, H L & C R, Guru Nanak Dev: His Life & Bani, 1996, p.31.

2. *khalaq ko adesh dhadi gavna*– SGGS p.148.

of vars in tunes prescribed in the Granth – bringing the practice closer to secular singing then prevalent for heroic ballads. Dhadhi jathas used to sing vars in bir-ras in the court of Guru Gobind Singh. He introduced the *khayal* style of singing in kirtan. Thus various genres of music ranging from dhrupad to secular were in practice in Guru's times, gurbani encouraged Sikhs to sing Akal Purakh's praises and the sangat often joined in the kirtan singing.

The use of musical instruments in kirtan started with the rebeck playing of Mardana. During the time of later Gurus use of other instruments got introduced. These include instruments like *rabab*, *sarinda*, *taoos*, *dilruba*, *mridang*, *tabla*, *dhadi*, *sarangi* used by the *rababis* and *dhadis*. The laity used instruments like *dholak*, *chimta*, *khartal* etc.

In *sodar*, the Guru describes the court of the Lord. His vision is of a place where music abounds – innumerable instrumentalists, infinite variety of notes and symphonies with the entire universe singing God's praises. Innumerable the notes, infinite the players, countless lending their voice, all singing His praises.³ Music has a special place in the Divine court.

The Gurus did not express preference for any raga - "The raga that awakens one's mind to God is the best."⁴ Gurus preached the great merits of kirtan - it removes impurity from mind⁵, helps gain freedom from cycle of transmigration,^{6 7} brings comfort to mind and body.⁸ Gurus commended kirtan as the highest expression of one's devotion.⁹

3. *vaje naad anek asankha kete vavanhaarey, kete raga pari siu kahian kete gavanhaare*— ibid, p.8.

4. *sabhna ragaan vich so bhala bhai jit vasya man aaye*— SGGS, slok varan te vadhik.

5. *gun gavat teri utras meil*— ibid. p.289.

6. *jo jan kare kirtan gopal tis ko poh ne sake jamkaal*— ibid. p. 867.

7. *har din rain kirtan gaave bohr neh joni paave*— ibid. p.62.

8. *sookh sehaj anand gun gaave man tan deh sukhal*— ibid. p.620.

9. *sabh te ooch bhagat ja ke sang, aath pehr gun gaaverang sarang*— ibid. Sarang, M V.

Those who sing and listen to kirtan their evil propensities are curbed, they receive what they desire, and misfortunes do not befall them.^{10 11} Congregational singing removes inhibitions, strengthens bonds of fellowship, and helps concentration and ecstatic state of mind.¹² Kirtan in the company of the virtuous earns the highest merit.¹³ Heaven is where His praises are sung.¹⁴

There are a couple of caveats however that we have to understand. The purpose of kirtan is that it should connect one with the divine. The Guru says that 'among all the musical measures that alone is sublime by which the Lord comes to abide within. The melodies in which the Guru's word is sung are all true and their worth cannot be told but the Lord is beyond melodies and airs and His will cannot be realized through these contrivances alone.'¹⁵ Likewise Kabir says that 'do not think it is just a song - it is meditation on God akin to the instructions given to the dying man at Benares. Ultimately highest status is obtained only by the person who sings or listens to the divine Name with conscious awareness.'¹⁶

Thus singing and music is seen to pervade the universe and our lives. It is not decried as unholy or forbidden but Sikhs are cautioned that only that singing is kirtan that helps in connecting with the divine. Outside of that there is room for singing and music in our mundane pursuits.

DANCE

Dancing unlike singing is not seen as a mode of worship in Gurbani though some verses seem to suggest that it were not

10. *jo jo kathy sunay har kirtan ta ki durmat nas* – ibid. p.1300.

11. *har kirtan sunai har kirtan gaave, tis jan dookh nikat neh aave* – ibid. p.190.

12. Sikh Review, Calcutta, Sep 2000, p.26.

13. *har kirat sadhsangat hai sir karman kae karma*– SGGS- p.642.

14. *tehain baikunth jeh kirtan tera*.

15. *sabhna ragan vich so bhala bhai jit vaseya man aaye* Slok M IV, p. 1423.

16. *log janai eih geet hai eih to braham beechaar, jio kaasee upades hoe maanas martee baar, koe gaavai ko sunai har naamaa chit laae, kahu kabeer sansaa nehee ant param gat paee* – Gauri Kabir, p. 335.

a total taboo. Let us see what the Gurus have said in their own words.

Guru Nanak has characterized dancing and prancing around as an expression of human urgings. Witness: 'O Nanak countless and endless are those that go round and round - the oil-press, spinning wheel, grinding stones, potter's wheel, countless whirlwinds in the desert, spinning tops, churning sticks, threshers, breathless tumblings of the birds and men moving round and round like on spindles. Bound in bondage by His will they spin around; dancing to the tune called by their karma. Those subsumed in dance and laughter will not fly to heavens or become Siddhas but shall depart crying. People dance and play on the urgings of their minds. O Nanak, love divine wells up only in hearts that feel His awe.'¹⁷

Significantly Guru Nanak has employed metaphors as experienced from life - mundane and natural phenomenon [whirlwinds in the desert, breathless tumblings of the birds] - to explicate going round and round but has singled out human urgings for pleasure as not contributing towards spiritual fulfillment. Guru Amardas reinforces the same thought by saying that 'dancing and jumping is no way of devotional worship. Merging in the divine is needed for any devotional worship to be accepted.'¹⁸

Guru Arjan clubs dancing with several other modes of worship like wearing ankle bells; keeping fasts, taking vows, wearing rosaries or putting ceremonial ritual marks on their foreheads that people use but says that as a meek devotee, he

17. *koloo charkha chakee chak, thhal vaarolai bahut anant, laattoo maadhhaania anagaah, pankhee bhoudheea lain n saah, sooi char bhavaaeahi jant, naanak bhoudhiaa ganat n anth.*

bandhhan bandh bhavaaeae soe, paeiai kirat nachai sabh koe, nach nach hasehi chalehi sae roe, oudd n jaahee sidhh n hohi, nachan kudhan man ka chao, nanak jin man bho tinha man bhao - Asa M I p. 465.

18. *nachiai tapiai bhagat n hoe, sabad marai bagat paaey jan soe - Gauri M III, p. 158.*

only meditates on Har, Har, Har.¹⁹ The suggestion clearly is that meditation as devotional worship is more acceptable. Kabir conveys the same thought in a different manner by placing a qualifier on dancing. He says that 'the real dancing [in prayer] is danced with your conscious-being beating to the rhythm for only true devotion and not pretension is pleasing to Him. So let the drum beat resonate within you and if you are such a dancer He will protect your being.'²⁰ In other words if the beat of the drum inspires inner resonance it is prayer otherwise it is only play.

Guru Nanak seems to be endorsing the same thought saying that 'let your understanding and feeling of love be like the music of accordion and the beat of drum that one dances to – and let such rhythmic harmony create bliss and lasting happiness in your mind.' Clearly feeling of harmony so experienced is brought about by the confluence of love divine and higher understanding, aided if so, by the musical beat. He goes on to say that 'attainment of such rhythmic harmony is akin to devotional worship, and the practice of penance. If you are so imbued, dance on, keeping the beat with your feet but know that the perfect beat is only praise of the Divine; other dancing just serves as a source of pleasure.'²¹ This seems to suggest that when one is in a state of harmony and rhythm of prayer becomes compelling, keeping the beat with feet may be acceptable though not perfect response.

Guru Ram Das persuades us to 'meditate on the name of the merciful Har, Har; with love, to forever sing His praises and in unison with true believers dance to the praises of Har,

19. *kinhee ghooghar nirat karaaee, kinhoo varat naem maala paaee, kinhee tilak gopee chandhan laaeiaa, mohi deen har har har dhhiaya* – Ramkali M V, p. 912.

20. *nachan soe jo man sio nachai, jooth n pateei parchai saachai, eis man aagae poorai thaal, eis naachan kae man rakhavaal* – Kabir Gond, p. 872.

21. *vaajaa mat pakhaavaj bhao, hoe anandh sada man chao, eaehee bhagat eaeheo tap tao, eit rang naachau rakh rakh pao. poorae taal jaanai saalaa h, hor nachanaa khuseeaa man maah* – Asa M I, p. 350.

Har, Har.²² The Guru seems to be more expansive by suggestively placing meditation, singing and rhythmic movement in the same genre as the mode of loving devotion.

Guru Arjan uses the metaphor of inner struggle for dance and says that if man makes the effort to control the five passions, in this dance, his mind becomes pure, self is silenced and the Divine One comes to dwell within. Such a humble servant sings His praises and dances as the guitar, drums, cymbals, dancing bells and the unstruck sound current of the Shabad resound.²³ Again singing and dancing seem to be placed in the same genre.

WHAT ARE THE GURUS SAYING?

Let us now try and understand the drift of moral guidance that the Gurus are giving us. Guru Nanak says 'eating, drinking, laughing and sleeping, the mortal forgets that he cannot remain forever and must die one day. Forgetting his Lord and Master his life is cursed and wasted. Meditate o mortal, on the One Master and you shall go to your true home with honor.'²⁴ In a similar vein Guru Arjan reminds us that 'eating, drinking, laughing and sleeping, life passes uselessly. Before being born we suffer the unbearable environment of the womb. Our pride, attachment and desires are not quenched through our life and in the end we are destroyed by death to wander in reincarnation. Meditate; vibrate on the Lord for all other actions are corrupt.'²⁵

In fact spending life only in eating, drinking, playing,

22. *har har naam dayal dhiahaa, har kai rang sada gun gaahaa, har har har jas ghoomar paavahu mil satsang oumaahaa raam* - Jaisri M IV, p. 698.

23. *udham karat hovai man nirmal nachai aap nivarai, panch janaa lai vasgat rakhai man meh ekankarae. tera jan nirat karae gun gavai, rabab pakhavaj thal ghungharoo anhad sabad vajavai* - Asa M V, p. 381.

24. *khana peena hasana souna visar gaya hai marna, khasam visaar khuaanee keenee dhrig jeevan nehee rehna, praanee eko naam dhhiaavau, apane path saetee ghar jaavau* - Malaar M I, p. 1254.

25. *har bhaj aan karam bikaar, maan moh n bujhat trisna kaal gras sansar, khaat peevat hasat sovat oudh bitee asaar, narak udhar bhramant jalto jameh keenee saar* - Sarang M V, p. 1229.

laughing and showing off is not commended at all. If one does not listen to praises of the Lord of supreme bliss his life is likened to making ostentatious displays on the dead and such life is characterized worse than that of beasts, birds or creeping creatures.²⁶

A shabad by Bhagat Namdev elucidates this tension in a very interesting though at the same time a very unrelated manner. He says that 'laughing and playing, I came to Your temple but while I was worshipping, I was grabbed and driven out because I am of a low social class. Why was I born into a family of fabric dyers, my Master? So I picked up my blanket, went out and sat behind the temple. Sitting there as Nama uttered Your praises, the temple turned around to face Your humble devotee.'²⁷

Even though the thrust of the verse is to draw attention to the prevalent discrimination to the entry into temples experienced by the lower castes the Bhagat says that laughing and playing he came to the temple. He was not ejected because he had come in that state of mind or his entry reflected that demeanor but because of his caste. However as he settled down to his prayer and was in communion with the divine the temple turned to face him. Surely this suggests a very strong pointer to the kind of possibility that the Guru's way seems to promise.

As a holistic faith where no denials and austerities are commended and the devotees are expected to live normal lives, the Gurus have not suggested placing their Sikhs in any strait jacket. They have asked them to strike a balanced path and the balance has to be achieved by us, individually and collectively in our own circumstances. The important thing is

26. *khaat peet khelat hasat bisthar, kavan arath miratak seegaar, jo n suneh jas paramananda, pasu pankhee trigadh jon te mandaa* - Gauri M V, p. 188.

27. *hasat khelat terae dhohuraa aaeiaa, bhagat karat naamaa pakar uthaya, heenrree jaat meree jaadhim raya, chheepae ke janam kaahe ko aaeiaa, lai kamlee chhalio paltaae, dhaehurai paachhai baitha jaae, jio jio naamaa har gun ucharai, bhagat janaan ko dhaehura firai* - Bhairon Naamdev, p. 1164.

that we should try and cultivate loving devotion of God while living full and active lives. Sikhs who understand the Guru's way will by his grace succeed in crafting such perfect balance that may help achieve liberation while laughing, playing, wearing fineries and savoring delicacies.²⁸

This should not suggest a license to live as one pleases – singing, dancing, wearing fine dresses, playing, imbibing delicacies and making merry. Nor does it suggest a regimen or a way of life that precludes all these. It suggests searching for possibilities that help us to bring a balance that meets both our spiritual and mundane quests. It connects the two. It does not shut the door on either.

28. *nanak satgur bhaettiai pooree hovai jugat, hasandhia khelandhia painandhia khaavandhia vichae hovai mukat* - Gujri M V, p. 522.

GURU RAM DAS & HIS BANI

This article is to share some thoughts on the writings of Guru Ram Das as witnessed in Guru Granth Sahib. I am conscious that any approach that may be seen as comparative would be indicative of poor sensitivity because the Gurus were indeed all inspired by the same vision of the Divine. They continued to share their message in their words with the laity exemplifying and addressing at times issues that arose as the persuasion started to influence the way the believers lived and related to the world they were living in.

In that backdrop I propose to start with a brief recapitulation of the Guru's life and times and then move on to some aspects of his writings to get an insight into his thought and his influence on evolving Sikh institutions and corporate religious and temporal life.

GURU'S LIFE & TIMES

Guru Ram Das was born in 1534, five years before Guru Nanak's passing. Only child of Hari Das and Daya Kaur, named Ram Das, he was popularly called Jetha [first born]. At 12 he traveled to Guru Angad's ministry at Khadur Sahib, with a group of Sikhs. Around the same time Angad asked Amar Das, who had been the Guru's disciple since 1540, to set up a new habitation in Goindwal and move there. Ram Das also moved thence.

Six years later, in 1552, Angad anointed Amar Das as his successor. Ram Das was 18 and had been in *seva* for six years. Active and dedicated, he was noticed and Guru Amar Das gave his daughter Bibi Bhani in marriage to him. The year

was 1554 and Ram Das was twenty. Twenty years later he was anointed successor to Amar Das. As it would come to pass, he would have served the longest period, 28 years, preparatory to succession.

All these years Ram Das had been a witness to the inner workings of the ministries of Angad and Amar Das. Even though he never saw Nanak, given his sensitivity, he would have assimilated essence of the founder Guru's mission and ministry, joining Guru's house seven years after Nanak's passing as he did. He therefore would have been acutely aware of the way the nascent *panth* was evolving under the guidance of successor Gurus to Nanak.

A recount of the times also would be helpful. With the Ghauri's occupation of North India towards the end of 12th century, Punjab came to be ruled by a series of Muslim dynasties around 172 years before the rest of country. In the process it also became the arena for the initial contact and ensuing struggle between Hindus and Muslims. The times of Nanak were marked by the tyrannical and unjust rule of Ibrahim Lodhi and Babar's invasions. Angad's ministry was for the most part during the Suri period. The ministries of Amar Das, Ram Das and Arjan coincided with the 50-year rule of Akbar. Issues of peace and justice that touched Nanak so passionately receded following more stable and organized governance that emerged during this period. Ram Das's writings are reflective of that societal mood.

So while the external environment was less hostile, the Gurus were steadily guiding the growing *panth* on to a path of translating their concept into an organized faith. Angad reformed Punjabi language to become a fit vehicle for literary writing. He also introduced sporting activities as part of the daily regimen among his followers and the *langar* in his time was managed by Mata Khivi, his wife - the first woman to be actively involved in leadership role in the emerging Sikh tradition and the only Sikh woman whose name finds a mention in the Granth.

Amar Das introduced several reforms and created an organization to manage the growing and widely dispersed Sikh community. He organized *manjis* and *piris* to locally take care of Sikh affairs in places as far away as Kabul and Dacca. Significantly women had a good share of leadership positions in these institutions. The Guru also encouraged the women to give up the practice of *purdah*, preached against *sati* and approved of widow remarriage. He also married his daughter to the chanting of *anand sahib*, making a break from the tradition he had grown up in.

During the ministry of Amar Das some Brahmin detractors of the Guru complained to Akbar that his practice of allowing all to eat together was ignoring the religious and social distinctions of the Hindus. Ram Das was sent to Lahore to the Emperor's court and explained effectively the Guru's persuasion of equality before God of all human beings causing the case to be dismissed. The encounter not only resulted in broader recognition of a basic tenet of Sikh thought but also an appreciation of the depth of understanding, communication abilities and engaging persona of Ram Das.

Like Angad had asked him, Amar Das also instructed Ram Das to construct a pool and develop a new habitation at the place now known as Amritsar. Ram Das got involved headlong into the project with zeal and commitment. His work, his piety and his conduct through the years earned the respect and confidence of the Guru as well as the *sangat* and all, as recorded in the Granth by Sundar, accepted his succession to Guru ship when so decided by Amar Das in 1574.

HIS WRITINGS & HIS MUSIC

Ram Das's compositions constitute a significant part of the Granth. He wrote 679 hymns including *pauris/slok* and eight *vars*. His compositions are included in daily Sikh prayers *rehras* and *kirtan sohela*. His *sloks* are included in *asa ki var* sung in the early pre dawn hours in most Gurdwaras. Sikh weddings are solemnized to the singing of hymns written by him. Written

in easy to understand, sometimes even folksy metaphors several of his verses have become part of every idiom e.g. *sevak jan seveh te parvan* [Tukhari]; *jion bhavai tion rakh lai* [Asa]; *akli sahib seveeay* [Sarang].

Ram Das came from a family already influenced by the Sikh Gurus and his association with the Gurus started even before he entered his teens. This background may have had some influence on his writings and style. Mythological references are few and rarely does he explain his thought through the prism of Hindu/Muslim thought and praxis. He seems comfortable with the thought, its mode of expression and confident in the receptivity of the audience. The language he uses is easy though the idiom indicates that he was mainly addressing those with Hindu background.

His verses have a smooth almost lyrical flow, sometimes repeating a word for emphasis, almost as if being recited in a group setting; witness -- *sabh kaho mukho nar narhare nar narhare nar narhare har laha har bhagat visekhya* [Kanra M IV, p. 1315]. He employs various metaphors to reinforce core Sikh beliefs and to bring into relief the emerging identity of the faith adherents. He reflects on his expectation of Sikhs and their relation with the Guru; their organization; their weddings, liturgy et al.

Musical measures or *ragas* provide the editorial frame of the Granth. He broadened this frame by increasing the range of *ragas* and secular measures used in his compositions. Hymns by Nanak are written to nineteen *ragas*; Angad's and Amar Das's respectively to six and seventeen of these *ragas*. Ram Das's compositions are to thirty *ragas*; eleven of them -- Devgandhari, Bihagra, Jaitsri, Todi, Bairari, Gaund, Nat Narayan, Mali Gaura, Kedara, Kanra and Kalyan - introduced to his writings only. Arjan also wrote to the same thirty *ragas*. One more *raga* was added by Guru Tegh Bahadur's compositions.

Ram Das also wrote eight of the twenty-two *vars*. Of the twenty two, there are eight *vars* for which the tunes to which these should be sung is suggested in the Granth. Ram Das wrote three of these eight - *var* in *raga vadhans* to the tune of

lallaa benlima, in sarang to tune of rai mehmas hasna and Kanra to tune of var of musa.

In fact the contribution of Ram Das to the musical repertoire in Granth is extensive. Not only did he broaden the range of *ragas* but also added to compositions sung to folk or secular music like *vars*, *ghorian*, *pehre*. He also introduced a stylistic variant *partal* [e.g. Bilawai p.802, Nat Narayan p.997, Kanra p.1296] in which the *antras* are sung to different *taal*; creating an ecstatic devotional effect. Some credit him with introducing the *sarinda*, a versatile string instrument specifically used to accompany in *kirtan*. He also rejected the notion of any relative hierarchy among *ragas* to which hymns were sung saying that the best *raga* was the one that helped instill love of the Divine in one's heart - *sabhna ragan vich so bhalla jit vaseya man aaey* - [Slok Varan te Vadhik]. He reinforced the persuasion that to earn merit one must sing God's praises with devotion - *jis nau parteet hove tis ka gavaya thaen pavey* - [Suhi] and that singing or listening to *kirtan* brings merit in the court of the Lord only if the Sikh places full faith in the teachings of the Guru - *gaveya suneya tin ka har thaeyn pavai jin satgur ki agya sat sat kar jani* - [Dhanasri M IV, p.669/11].

GOD - CONCEPT

All the Gurus in their writings have variously recognized how God's being could not really be fully comprehended or described. Ram Das also says there is none other like You - *tujh bin dooja avar neh koey* - [Asa]. If there was another like Him, we would speak of that being - *tudh jevad sarik hovey teh aakhiye* - [Var Bihagre ki]. He calls upon people not to be gullible to be blindly misguided into looking up to the slaves [gods and goddesses] rather than the supreme Lord Himself - *thakur chhod dasi ko sincheh manukh andh agayana* - [Bhairon].

To give a flavor of his wrestling with the perplexing vision of God, I turn to six *shabads* in Sorath by the Guru that could be termed as *aahey de shabad*. The verses explore the nature of the Supreme Being using the metaphor of cause and effect,

purpose and reward and set out the attributes of God in a lucid, homely way. The perplexed devotee is told that God has created all that we see, do and experience in our lives. God also creates the diverse pulls and pressures and consummates transactions in life. He creates the tensions; in fact He is the tensions, their cause and the solution. One should therefore take life as an experience ordained and directed by God and be fully involved because all its facets, good, bad, inspiring, disappointing, successes, failures are but play of God's immanence. Witness some extracts - He pervades all yet is detached; is trader, banker, trade and credit - - - is listener and speaker too; leads to failure also shows the way out; is involved fully yet carefree - - - creates all brings into being, gives them vocations and destroys too; is the wharf and also the ferry - - - is the ocean, the ship, the pilot and the passenger; looking joyously at His wondrous play He in His mercy, forgives and allows the mortal to blend with His own Self - *aapey aap vartada piyara aape aap apah, vanjara jug aap hai hai piyara aape sacha saha, aape vanj vapareya piyara aape sach vesah — aape sun sabh vekhda piyara mukh bolai aap muhah, aape ujhar paeyda piyara aap vikhale rah, aape he sabh aap hai piyara aape veparwah, — aape aap upaeda piyara sir aape dhandre lah, aap karaey sakhti piyara aap maare mar jah, aape patan paatni piyara aape paar langah, — aape sagar bohith piyara gur khevat aap chalho, aape he charh langda piyara kar choj vkhai patshaho, aape aap dayal hai piyara jan nanak baksh milaho* - [Sorath M IV, p. 604].

A different flavor comes through in *so purkh*, part of the Sikh daily evening prayer *rehras*. The composition reflects on the attributes of God and ways to merge in His light. Written in simple, spoken language, the verses succinctly bring out the foundational Sikh beliefs. See an abridged annotation:

All beings meditate on God - the unreachable, unfathomable, unrivalled; true Creator; provider for all, dispeller of suffering - He is the Lord and slave too; what significance of poor humans! *har aape thakur aape sevak ji kya nanak jant vichara.*

He is immanent in all; being rich or poor is his play; He

is the provider and consummator of His giving; Infinite, His attributes cannot be counted. Blessed are those that serve His cause - *jo seveh jo seveh tudh ji jan nanak tin kurbana*.

Those who meditate on You live in peace; will be liberated. They are truly blessed. Their fears dispelled those who serve You will merge with the Lord - *jin seveya jin seveya mera har ji te har har roop samasi*.

Diverse are the ways to pray and abundant the treasures of Thy prayer. Your devotees praise Thee variously - through penance, rituals, repeating Your name, following Smritis, Shastras and six rites. Yet praying that pleases You is the best - *se bhgat se bhagat bhaley jan nanak ji jo bhavai mere har bhagwanta*.

None is greater than You, ever stable, unchanging Lord. What You like comes to pass. You create, destroy. Nanak sings praises of the all knower Lord - *jan nanak gun gaavai karte ke ji jo sabhsai ka janoee*. [Asa M IV, p.10]

The verses beautifully bring out the message that service of, meditating on, and singing God's praises are the ways to pray that will lead to liberation. Other paths are there and many follow them but will gain approval only if God so likes - all conveyed in a gentle, soft metaphor by placing the practices in juxtaposition rather comparison.

LONGING FOR THE DIVINE

Some of Guru Ram Das's most poignant compositions are those where his deep emotions of love for the Divine are expressed. In his hands the often-used simile of a woman longing for her lover makes these verses resonate in the devotee's heart. Some examples of the soulful outpourings of the Guru are appended below.

In Rag Bihagra *chhant* Guru Ram Das has written 6 *shabads* all addressed to - *meri jindriye* - 'my soul'. All the verses are reflective of the poignant prayer of a soul longing for union with the Lord. The rhyme and metaphor is eminently suited for reciting together in a congregational setting - at once absorbing and uplifting. The longing when consummated in

union is described in words that leave one deeply touched, elevated to a state of bliss, almost as if in harmony with the music of the spheres - *chiri vichhuna har prabh paeya gal mileya sehj subhaye ram, jan nanak man anand bheya hai meri jindriye anhad sabad vajey ram* - [Bihagra M IV, p. 538].

The metaphor for the longing becomes lyrical, life like, humble, human, in deep anguish almost lost, seeking, searching, looking for an answer - adorn I myself in various dresses so that I may please my Lord but if my Lord does not even as if look at me what should I tell my aching heart? Is it that for the One for whom I have adorned myself is imbued with the love of another? Sayeth Nanak that blessed is the bride who savors the love of the true sublime Lord - *hau sabh ves kari pir karan je har prabh sache bhavan, so pir peyara main nadar neh dekhai hau kio kar dheeraj pawan, jis karan hau seegar seegari so pir rata mera avra, nanak dhan dhan sohagan jin pir gawareya sach sawra* —

Continuing he provides the answer - *sabh man tan jio karo har prabh ka it marag bhainey miliye, aapanra prabh nadar kar dekhai nanak jot jot raliyai* - the way to meet the Lord, my friend, is to surrender your mind, being and soul to Him and then if the Lord's look of grace falls on you, your light will blend in His. Thank you, thank you, the heart spontaneously responds - *jo har prabh ka main deye sneha tis man tan apna devan, nit pakha pheri sev kamawan tis aagey pani dhowan* - for any one who brings me the tidings of my Lord, I would gladly offer my body and soul, serve day and night waving the fan, filling water, anything! [Vadhans M IV, p. 561]

And when the dear Lord does deign to come to the pining devotee's chambers the experience as if at once brings peace and harmony to the restless heart - *mera har prabh sejai aya man sukh samana ram* - [Chhant Bilawal M IV, Mangal].

The Guru is reassuring in that this relation between God and His devotees is not entirely one sided. God is a friend to His devotees. He loves them. He responds to them the same way as a musical instrument resonates to the touch of a musician - *har dasan sion preet hai har dasan ko mit. har dasan kai vas hai jion*

janti kai vas jant [Var Sorath, Slok M IV, p.652] For in truth, those who meditate on God become like God and He meets them joyfully - *har ke sant japoh har japna har sant chalai har nali, jin har japeya so har hoey har mileya kel kelali* [Dhanasri M IV, p. 667].

GURU & SIKH: INSPIRE, MOTIVATE & LEAD

Guru in Sikh thought helps the devotee connect with *shabad* that in turn enshrines *nam* in the devotee's consciousness putting the person on the path of God realization. Ram Das in his compositions has expounded on the same thought saying - to you, true Guru, man of God and searcher of truth I make my supplication - my Guru, I am insignificant like a crawling worm, in your kindness take me in your protection and bless me with the light of *nam* - - [for] accursed are lives of those who have not sought protection of the true Guru - - [whereas] those who found the Guru, the slave of God, are destined to connect with God; blessed is the congregation of the seekers of truth in whose midst God's love abounds and *nam* is always manifest - *har ke jan satgur sat purkha binau karon gur paas hum keera kiram satgur sarnai kar daya nam pargas - - - jo satgur saran sangat nahin aaey dharig jeevay dharig jeevas - - jin harjan satgur sangat payee tin dhur mastak likheya likhas, dhan dhan sat sangat jit har ras paeya mil jan nanak nam pargas* - [Rag Gujri M IV - p.10]

He had a very high level of respect and regard for the Guru and for the institution of Guru ship. The Guru is a true friend, guide, and philosopher. Sikhs love him and come storm, high wind or rain, they will always go to have a glimpse of his Guru - *jhakhar jhagi mehn varsai bhi gur dekhani ko jaayi* - [Suhi]. Absent service of the true Guru all that we do only adds to our bondage; there is no rest for our soul as it continues through cycles of birth and death; our protestations are hollow because *nam* will not dwell within us and we will depart in ignominy to the pain and suffering of death - *bin satgur seve jee ke bandhana jete karam kamaheh, bin satgur seve thawar neh pawehi mar jameh aaweh jaey, bin satgur seve phika bolna nam neh vasey*

men aaey, nanak bin satgur seve jam pur badhe marieh moh kale uth jaey - [Bihagre ki Var Slok M IV, p. 552].

Let us now look at some thoughts he has articulated on being a Sikh. He has given expression to what may be his expectations of a Sikh. He says - one who wants to be known as Guru's Sikh rises early and meditates on the Divine; he is inclined to strive and starts his day by cleansing himself physically and spiritually; as he continues to be absorbed in thinking of God and Guru's teachings his sins and misdeeds are forgiven; with the day advancing he sings God's praises and stays attuned to *nam* even as engaged in all the various activities. Guru favors the Sikh who is in communion with the Divine continuously and shares his teachings with such a blessed person. Nanak begs the dust of feet of that Sikh who is and makes others prayerful - *gur satgur ka jo sikh akhaey so bhalkey uth har nam dhiavai, udham karey bhalkey parbhati isnan karey amritsar naavai, updes guru har har jap jaapai sabh kilvikh paap dokh leh jaavai, phir chareh divas gurbani gaavai bahdean uthdeyan har nam dhiavai, jo sas giras dheaeey mera har har so gursikh guru man bhavai, jis nau dayal hoe mera swami tis gursikh ko updes sunavai, jan nanak dhoor mangai tis jan ki jo aap japai avreh nam japavai* - [Gujri ki Var M IV, p. 305-6]

He says at another place that Sikhs of the Guru have great love for God and worship their Guru. Their vocation is *nam* and they profit by it. Their image is clean and they are acceptable in the Lord's court. They share the Guru's treasure of *nam* and blessed are the Sikhs who constantly meditate on God's name. - *gur sikhian man har preet hai gur poojan aavai, har nam vanjeh rang sio laha har nam lai javai, gursikhian ke mukh ujley har dargeh bhavah, gur satgur buhal har nam ka vadbhagi sikh gun sanjhi karavai, tina gursikhian ko hau varya jo bahadeya uthdeyan har nam dheaveh* - [Vadhans ki Var M IV, p.590/11]

He also tells that listening to and accepting the Guru's teachings is important and blessed are the Sikhs who listen to the Guru's divine sermon — and it is Sikhs with whom God is pleased who internalize Guru's word- *sey gursikh dhan dhan*

*hai jini gur updes suneya har kani — jinan gur sikhian ko har santusht
hai tinni satgur ki gal manni -* [Vadhans ki Var, M IV, p.590/
12]

Most fortunate are the Guru's Sikhs who fall at Guru's feet [follow in their steps] - *sabhdoo vadey bhag gur sikhian ke jo gur charnee sikh parteya* [Sorath ki Var, M IV, p. 649/18]. Blessed indeed is the Sikh who seeks the Guru - - - who by serving the Guru learns the *nam*; who utters God's name and to whom listening to *nam* is blissful - - - such a Sikh treading Guru's path deserve high praise and respect - *dhan dhan so gursikh kahiey jo satgur charni jaey peya — tis gursikh kaun haun sad namaskari jo gur kai bhanai gursikh chaleya* [Vadhans ki Var, M IV, p. 593/18]

At yet another place - Sikhs who serve the Guru are blessed and Nanak is ever sacrifice to them [10] — those Sikhs of the Guru who meditate on the Lord and keep *nam* in their hearts are loved by the Guru and will be saved [14] — the Guru recites divine word adorned with *nam* and Sikhs who hear and internalize it will not crave no more for anything [18] - *jo gur sikh gur sevde so pun prani, jan nanak tin ko vareya sada sada kurbani /10, jin har nama har cheteya hirdey urdharey, tin jam nerh. neh aavei gursikh gur piarey /14, gur rasna amrit boldi har nam suhavee; jin sun sikhian gur maneya tina bukh sabh javee/18* [Tilang M IV, p.725-6]

On Guru's part he assures Sikhs that Guru will listen to their woes when they are feeling low, downcast, defeated. They should then put aside their discerning intellect, submit to the Guru and supplicate for the troubling thoughts to go away. Associating with saintly will help overcome any obstacles and the venerable Guru will remove their fears and anxieties and bring them to a state of happiness momentarily - *ji ki birtha hoe so gur peh ardas kar, chodh sianap sagal man tan arap dhar, poojoh gur ke pair durmat jaey jar, sadh jan kai sang bhavjal bikham tar, sevoh satgur dev agai neh maroh dar, khin main karey nihai unney subhar bhar -* [Rag Gujri Var M IV, p.517]

The Guru loves all his Sikhs equally like friends, sons and

brothers - *gur sikhān iko piar gur mitan putan bhaian* - [Var Sorath M IV, p. 648]. Sacrifice is the Guru, sacrifice is he to such Sikh of the Guru, his dear friend who recites to him, his support, the Lord's name - *hau vari hau vari gursikh meet piarey ram, har namo har nam sunaey mera pritām nam adhare ram* [Vadhans M IV, p. 573].

For the mutuality of Guru - Sikh relation, however, the Sikh has to recognize that Guru is like a field of faith where one reaps as one sows. If Guru's Sikh sows the purest nectar he will receive liberating fruit in return; bright will be his countenances here and in the hereafter and he will be favored with robes of honor in God's court - *satgur dharti dharam hai tis vich jeha ko beejai teha phal paey, gursikhi amrit beejaya tin amrit phal har paey, oona halt palt mukh ujlai ohi har dargeh sachi pehnaey* - [Gauri ki Var, Slok M IV, p. 302]

Sikhs who come up to the measure of the Guru, he holds them in very high esteem and asks of them to - give me the gift of *nam*, my friends, for that is life of my life. I am slave to those Sikhs of the Guru who are imbued with the love of God. In my being, body and mind, the love of Guru's Sikh has welled up - he is my friend in life, my brother and I plead unto him to instruct me how to meet with my Lord - *gurmukh sakhi saheli meri mo kau devo daan har pran jeevaya, ham hoveh lalle gole gursikhan ke jina andin har prabh purkh dheyaia mere man tan biroh gursikh pag laya, mere pran sakha gur ke sikh bhai mo ko karo updes har milai milaya* - [Gujri M IV, p.493].

The Guru now is placing such a Sikh at a very high pedestal indeed explained possibly by the thought that the Guru and his Sikh are both engaged in bringing the same message to the people - *guru sikh sikh guru hai eko gur updes chalaey* [Asa M IV, p.444].

This insight into role of the Guru, his Sikh and their relationship would bring home the multi-faceted inspirational and motivational approach of the Guru in communicating his thought to the Sikhs. His life and personal example reinforce his expressed thought and bring meaning to the assurance of

the love and support that their Guru has for Sikhs. He urges Sikhs to the path of virtuous and prayerful living in words that are encouraging and offer hope. He honors those who persevere by saying that they are as good as the Guru himself; nay that he would himself seek guidance of such Sikhs to connect with the Divine. He urges them on despite difficulties by assuring them that Guru is always there for them in support of their endeavors. Could there be much more that we would expect of a great inspirational leader?

HUMAN BEING & DESTINY

Sikh precepts on the significance and purpose of human life consider human incarnation a great gift of God and the unique opportunity for union with the Divine. This union has to be achieved living the life of a householder and the traditional Indian concept of four *ashrams* where the individual finally retires to a life of renunciation of civic life to seek spiritual elevation is not commended. One gets a glimpse of Sikh Guru's views on stages of life - *ashrams* - in four *shabads*, two by Guru Nanak, one by Guru Ram Das and one by Guru Arjan Dev titled *pehre*. While there are some small differences in the various presentations, by and large the basic concept remains the same. In all the *shabads* life is considered akin to a night, divided into four *pehres* or time periods as traditionally understood. Individual is addressed as *vanjara*, a merchant consummating various transactions as he travels along the journey of life. The man is instinctively motivated that his dealings are profitable - but the real gain is getting acceptance in God's court. A brief annotation of the paradigm presented by Ram Das is given below.

The first stage is said to begin on being conceived. The environment surrounding the fetus is uncomfortable and it survives contemplating of God, praying and uttering His name. At his birth even as it is to great delight of mother and father, the baby is reminded to continue to meditate on God and seek His mercy.

In the second stage as the child grows in the lap of great love, his parents begin harboring an expectation that the child will support them when they grow old. The pull of human bondage and conflict of duality pervades child's thinking and he begins to embrace the worldly things. Rare is the one who is contemplative and cherishes God's love in his heart at this stage.

In the third stage the person is fully embroiled in the entanglements of a householder's life. He contemplates not the God's name but is focused on gathering material comforts and wealth, little realizing that this wealth is false and ephemeral. Such people depart in sorrow while those whom the Lord mercifully unites with the Guru remember God and end up merging in the Lord.

As the final stage approaches death is close and time is fleeting. The man is told to recognize that the Guru who put him on path of prayer is no different from God and he now must serve the Guru every moment. He is enjoined to live life joyfully savoring God's thought, as a true devotee, so that fear of birth and death goes away and his endeavor is fruitful [Sri Rag M IV, Pehre - p. 76].

A couple of observations may be relevant here. Clearly the Sikh thought is that life does begin at conception. This may have a bearing on our position on life related issues being so much a part of the present day pro-life and pro-choice discourse as well as the social issue of female infanticide. Also even though there is the suggestion of more intensely trying to mould oneself to a prayerful life as one advances in age, there is no suggestion of withdrawal to achieve this objective. As Ram Das says in another place - *tajey girhast bhaya banvasi ik khin manooa tikey neh tikaiya*- that even if one may give up family and abide in a forest the mind still continues to be restless [Bilawal M IV, p, 834]; endeavor therefore has to be to achieve detachment while living in the midst of fulsome life as a householder - *vichai ghrast udas rahai* - [Gujri, M IV, p. 494]

Guru Ram Das also says like other Gurus that birth as human is obtained through prior good deeds and could go waste if one forgets the *nam* - *manas janam pun kar paeya bin naavai dharig dharig birtha jaaey* - [Gujri M IV, p. 493]. Human body is home of righteousness and repository of Divine light - *eh sareer sabh dharam hai jis andar sachay kee vich joti* - [Gujri M IV, p.309]. The Guru therefore says that blessed is the tongue that sings of God's name; ears that listen to His praises; head that bows before the Guru; eyes that see the saintly; hands that write God's praises; feet that carry men onto the path of righteousness. Nanak is sacrifice unto those who hear of and believe in God's name - *sa rasna dhan dhan hai meri jindriey gun gaave har prabh kere ram, tai sarvan bhale sabh neek heh meri jindriey har kirtan suneh har tere ram, so sees bhala pavitra pavan hai meri jindriey jo jaey lagai gur pairai ram, — te netra bhaley parwan heh meri jindriey jeh sadhu satgur dekheh ram, te hast punnet pavtra heh meri jindriey jo har jas har har lekhai ram, tis jan ke pag nit poojeh meri jindriey jo marag dharam chalesai ram, nanak tin vitoh varian meri jidriey har sun har nam maneseh ram* - [Bihagra M IV, p. 540]

The Guru also unambiguously resolved some of the traditional negative thoughts about material things and economic activity and spiritual pursuit. He persuaded the Sikhs that material possessions are pure and blessed if the means used to achieve them were fair; the owner is virtuous and their use is for altruistic purposes. He says - wealth, fineries, delicacies, rites, beliefs and deeds of the prayerful are blessed; homes, mansions, palaces of those are blessed where the needy and saintly are welcome to seek shelter; and horses and saddlery of those is blessed that the virtuous can avail - *tin ka khada paida maya sabh pavit heh jo nam har ratey, tin ke ghar mandir mahal sarai sabh pavit heh jini gurmukh sevak sikh abhiagat jaey varsatey, tin ke turey jeen khurgeer sabh pavit heh jini gurmukh sikh sadh sant chadh jaatey, tin ke karam dharam karaj sabh pavit heh jo boleh har har ram nam har satey, jin kai potey pun hai se gurmukh sikh guru peh jatey*. [Sorath ki Var M IV, p. 649/16] Significantly there is acceptance of plurality of rites, beliefs and action

choices as long as they stand the test of altruism.

WEDDING LITURGY

A major contribution of Ram Das is the definition he brought to Sikh wedding liturgy. The compositions he wrote relating to the celebration of every stage and ceremony have over time evolved the Sikh weddings into a unique, dignified and spiritually enhancing experience. The ceremony and liturgy represent an authentic blend of Sikh worship and joyous celebration of the foundational Sikh quest to reach the portals of the Divine as a married person.

Starting with the ceremony solemnizing the betrothal, called *kurmai* the Guru has lauded in his hymn saying that imbued with truth and contentment the groom's father has come with the proposal and gift of *kurmai - sat santokh kar bhao kuram kurmai aaya balram jeeo* – [Suhi Chhant M IV, p. 772/3].

He also composed two *shabads* entitled *ghorian*; traditionally songs sung at the time of weddings when the groom is ready to alight the horse for proceeding to bride's house for the marriage ceremony. The message of the *shabad* is that human incarnation; Guru's guidance and the person's endeavor are essential to the abiding, enduring relationship with God that will transcend the ephemeral and transient. The human body is referred to as - *kanchan* - gold made more precious if *nam* dwells in it. Witness some extracts - mounting the body mare a mortal crosses the hazardous ocean of life and given Guru's guidance achieves supreme bliss — with Lord's mercy upon servant Nanak, he mounting the body-horse, has reached the Lord. - *chadh deharh ghorī bikham langaey mil gurmukh parmananda — jan nanak har kirpa dhari deh ghori chadh har paiya* – [Vadhans M IV, Ghorian - p.575-6]

There are several hymns that may be sung welcoming the groom's arrival at the bride's place in the ceremony known popularly as *milni*. Sample one that says that the Lord has blessed this celebration as a God conscious groom has arrived for his wedding - *har prabh kaj rachaeya gurmukh viha-an aaya* –

[Suhi Chhant, M IV, p. 775].

The actual Sikh wedding ceremony involving circumambulation around the Granth by the bridal couple is to the accompaniment of singing of Guru's verses called *lavan*. The composition is a four-quartet hymn; the couple circumambulating four times; once as each quartet is sung. Bowing to the Granth at the end of each round symbolizes couple's acceptance of the divine message.

In the first quartet the couple is impressed the duties of wedded life – to hold fast to faith and righteous conduct; contemplate on God and dwell on the Guru for attainment of good fortune and eternal bliss. Thus marriage rite is commenced by making the first round – *jan kahey nanak lav pehli arambh kaj rachaeyya*.

The second round symbolizes meeting the Guru who helps free the mind of fear, and ego. Subsumed now in singing God's praises one perceives the Lord pervade both within and without. Thus the second round is expressive of joy to the resounding music of divine melody – *jan nanak dooji lav chalai anhad sabad vajaey*.

And now one is at a stage when love of the Lord wells up within and meeting the virtuous singing God's praises and reciting His words one connects with the Divine. Symbolically the third round kindles the true love, that of God, in both their hearts – *jan nanak bolai teejee lavain har upjai man bairag jio*.

Finally, by Guru's grace we have met our Lord, culmination of our desires, and our conscious now comprehends the divine. The Lord treats us sweetly and we serve him with love night and day. Thus in this fourth round we have found our eternal, imperishable Lord – *jan nanak bolai chaauthi lavain har paeya prabh avinasi* – [Suhi M IV, p. 773].

The ceremony finishes singing a hymn of thanksgiving heralding completion of the wedding. O my father I am now wedded and by Guru's blessings I am united with my Lord – *veha hoa mere babla gurmukhai har paiya* – [Siri Rag M IV, p. 78]

CONCLUDING

Several who had witnessed his ministry have lauded Guru Ram Das richly. Satta and Balwand, who are said to have served his congregation as musicians, say – blessed is Ram Das embellished by the Lord who created him and completed His miracle by installing him as Guru; deeming him as the Lord. Sikhs and the congregations bowed before him; he is unwavering, unfathomable, beyond measure or bounds – *dhan dhan ramdas guru jin sireya tineh sawareya, poori hoee karamat aap sirjanharey dhareya, sikhi atey sangti parbrahm kar namaskareya, atal athah ataul toon tera ant neh paravareya* [Ramkali ki Var, p.968].

Bhai Gurdas, his *masand* at Agra and later the scribe of Granth, says – away from attachment and jealousies he has adopted *raj yoga*. None can know the mystery of his mind, speech and actions. He is bestower, enjoyer, and he has created holy congregations which is equal to abode of gods. He remains absorbed in innate poise, the master of unfathomable intellect, and being the true Guru he sets every one's disordered life in order – *rag dokh nirdokh hai raj jog vartey vartara, mansa vacha karmana maram neh jaapai apar apara, data bhugta daiya daan dev sathal satsang udhara, sehj samadh agadh bodh satgur sach sawaranhara* [Var 24:14 – translation Dr. Jodh Singh]

Such was the man, Ram Das. It is not possible to present a comprehensive perspective on his thought for really his writings and his life cover a huge canvas. There is also so much that is beyond my limited comprehension. I have at best attempted to bring together some themes emerging from his thought the way I understood them. I can only pray for his blessings for as Bhatt Keerat said – I am but full of blemishes with little merit; always tempted by *maya* enamored of material things and worldly attachment; congregation of the Guru, they say, shows the path to liberation; so pray Ram Das extend thy benevolent protection unto me – *ham avgun bharey ek gun nahee, amrit chhaad bikhey bikh khaee, maya moh bharam pai bhooley sut dara sion preet lagai, ik uttam panth suneyo gur sangat the milant jam tras mitaee, ik ardas bhaant keerat ki gur ramdas rakho sarnaee*

THE UNIVERSAL & INCLUSIVE IN GURU GRANTH SAHIB: FROM CELEBRATING TO SHARING

Granth contains the writings of the Sikh Gurus and selected saints. The texts have not been modified or altered in any manner since their writing. The compositions are written in poetic format and set to music organized not by themes or authors but per musical measures. The contents are songs in praise of God written in spoken language of the people in the region, with the pearls of divine wisdom scattered in lyrical metaphors from life. Considering that the Gurus lived and preached in times when the population consisted of Hindus, Muslims and those who were treated as low castes, the metaphor used in the text often refers to these categories. The message undoubtedly is intended for all people.

UNIVERSAL & INCLUSIVE IN GRANTH

There are certain features associated with the Granth that make it unique among religious scriptures. Firstly it is possibly the only sacred religious text that contains compositions of holy persons from other faiths who believed in and practiced faithfully their own traditions. The texts included are those written by six Sikh Gurus plus several Hindu, Muslim and Shudra saints of the time period between 12th and 17th century from various parts of India including Bengal, Uttar Pardesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Sindh and Punjab.

Next it is also considered the first scripture of the world

that is respectful of the dignity and honor of all [not of selective some] faiths and their sacred texts. Guru Arjan, who compiled the text of the Granth, says – you get a vision of God in Vedas, Puranas and Simritees [Hindu sacred texts]; you get it in the moon, the sun and the stars; all His revelations are the unwavering God's word that is addressed to the entire mankind; not exclusively to some.¹ Bhagat Kabir intones all not to think of Vedas and Kateb [sacred texts belonging to Semitic faiths – Bible, Torah, Quran] as untrue for falseness lies in the inability of those who cannot ponder over and grasp the truths enshrined in them.² Nanak says in another context that reading and pondering over them, as one understands their four doctrines, the four Vedas have proved to be true.³

Recognizing the multiplicity of paths Ram Das says that the treasure of devotion to God is overflowing, infinite and beyond measure and God's devotees praise Him in various and countless ways – - - and of all devotees [variously trying to reach God] sublime are those whose devotion is pleasing to God.⁴ The emphasis is clearly on the quality of devotion rather than its manner or path; be it worship, disciplined meditation or chanting prayers.

Amar Das also tells us that even though the savants and sages may speak in response to specific situations their teachings are the shared heritage of all mankind.⁵ Underpinning the same sentiment of shared heritage is the fact of referring to

1. *bed puraan simrit meh dekh saseear soor nakhyathir meh ek baanee prabh kee sabh ko bolai aap addol n kabehoo dolai* - [Gauri M V, p. 294].

2. *bayd katayb kahau mat jhoothay jhoothaa jo na bichaarai* - [Parbhati Kabir p.1350].

3. *chaaray ved hoey sachiaar parheh guneh tin chaar veechaar* - [Asa, Slok M I p. 470].

4. *teri bhagath teri bhagath bhandar ji bharai beant beanta, teri bhagath teri bhagath salaahan thudhh ji har anik anek ananta - - - se bhagath se bhagath bhale jan nanak ji jo bhavee mere har bhagavanta* - [Asa M IV, So Purkh, p.10].

5. *parthai sakhi maha purkh bolde sanjhi sagal jahanai* - [M III, p.647].

the contents of the Granth as – *sarab sanjhi gurbani* – universally shared God's word revealed through the Gurus. Thus beneath their strong sense of reverence for the Granth, Sikhs have an underlying sentiment of humble acceptance that theirs is a revelation shared and to be shared with one and all.

Bringing together such an anthology of sacred texts containing writings by followers of different persuasions has its own hazards. Scriptures are intended to guide the believers and must necessarily reflect a strand of consistent thought. There are therefore instances where the Gurus wrestled with such choices in their endeavor and Granth is a witness to the degree of sensitivity Gurus displayed when they felt a need to clarify or moderate the message by poets of other faiths in the context of their own teachings. The Gurus in such instances have commented on or appended an observation on the writing immediately following the text concerned. An example or two will make the nature of such comments clear and also provide an indication of the tolerant, respectful and constructive approach used.

Kabir in his *saloks* laments - Kabir, what can my wanting or thinking achieve for God does not respond to my desires; He does whatever He likes - things that are far from my thoughts. To this Amar Das has added a comment saying God is the One who creates in us worries and is also the dispeller of our anxieties; He cares for us all and let us therefore sing His praises.⁶ In another example Farid says – O Farid, I used to think that I alone had problems but as I developed greater understanding, I realized that suffering afflicts all homes and families. Seemingly sensing a mood of despair, Arjan added the comment - Farid, in the midst of this beautiful world there is a clump of thorny bushes but those who have God's blessings

6. *kabir jo main chitvo neh karai kya mere chitvai hoey, apna chitveya har karey jo mere chit neh hoey* — M III - *chinta bhi aap karaeyi achint bhi aap karai, nanak so salahiey jeh sabhna saar karey* —[Salok Kabir, p.1376].

suffer not a scratch going through life.⁷ The Guru is restoring a buoyant feeling in both instances.

This backdrop would indicate that Sikhism is open to the thought that there can be and are several paths to reach the Divine. The critical determinant of being able to connect with God is not the path but understanding and fidelity of the devotee to the principles of the path. Similar persuasion flows also from the Sikh understanding of belief in One God, common to and shared by all. Arjan says that once the illusion is lifted off one's mind by the Guru's teaching, realization comes that God may be addressed as Allah or Parbrahm; both are one and the same.⁸ Not just that, as Nanak says in another place, in fact if one were to be able to really grasp the truth, one would recognize that with one Creator, unchanged over the ages, mankind has only one religion.⁹

What could be the characteristics of such a shared universal and inclusive persuasion? The Gurus have addressed that at several places in different contexts; witness a couple. Nanak reminds the Yogi that true religiosity consists not in mere talking but considering each one alike and treating them as equals.¹⁰ Arjan sums it up saying that loving devotion of God and living a virtuous life is the most exalted expression of religiosity.¹¹

God is the shared father of all humanity.¹² He besides being the sole creator, sustainer and destroyer has the attributes of being just, kind, compassionate, forgiving, loving, friendly

7. *farida main janeya dukh mujh koo dukh sabhaheey jag, oochhe charh ke dekheya ghar ghar eha agg* -- M V - *farida bhoom rangawali manjh visoola bagh, jo jan pir nivajeya tina anch neh laag* -- [Slok Farid, p. 1382].

8. *kaho nanak gur khoey bharam, eko alloh parbrahm* -- [Ramkali M V, p. 897].

9. *eko dharma dir-rhai sach koey, gurmata poora jug jug soey* -- [Basant M I, p. 1188].

10. *galee jog na hoee. ek darisat kar samsar jaanai jogee kaheei soi* - [Suhi M I, p. 730].

11. *sagal dharma main sresht dharma, har ka nam jap nirmal karam* -- [Gauri Sukhmani M V].

12. *toon sanjlia sahib bap hamara* -- [Majh M V p. 97].

and protective of the virtuous. This concept is put even more assertively by Ravidas saying that God cannot be claimed to be the exclusive Sire of any person or sect; He belongs to all those who love Him.¹³ In keeping with the same strain of thought we are also persuaded that humans were not created as Hindus or Muslims or for that matter belonging to any faith or tradition - verily all our bodies and souls emanate from one God alone.¹⁴

The transcendent and immanent in God is reconciled by considering the creation a result of divine self-revelation - partial, not that God's being is exhausted in the world alone. The creation is real but is constantly changing and in that sense it becomes illusory - *maya*. God has created diversity in nature with a purpose. Even though man is the highest form of creation, God created and gave specific roles to all the diverse beings. Man has been given the ability to use the resources in creation for his purposes but must remember that God is happy with what He has created, loves it and looks at it joyfully. Respect for balance in creation and treating it as a shared gift of God to all the beings informs the Sikh thought on issues confronting mother earth.

On terra firma, the Granth does give a couple of visions of the ideal human society. One by Ravidas says that the name of such an ideal place is 'land sans grief. In that place there is no suffering nor are there anxieties, hardships, or levies. None causes fear, blemish or failure of others. That marvelous place [home now to Ravidas] enjoys ever-lasting peace and safety; is orderly and stable, overseen by God. The populace is all equal, none high or low and people always well spoken. Their bodies in comfort, minds contented, people freely stroll about where they like and no one blocks their entry to the Lord's abode.¹⁵ Clearly a poignant reflection of the ideal envisioned

13. *aapan baapai naahin kisi ko bhavan ko har raja* - [Sorath Ravidas p. 658].

14. *neh ham hindu neh musalman, allah ram kai pind pran* - [Bhairon M. V p. 1136].

15. *bey gam pura sehr ko nau* - - [Gauree Gwaarayree Ravidas, p.345].

by the Shudra saint who may have endured a lot of discrimination in his everyday life. Another hymn indicative of a vision of serene social setting by Arjan says that God has commanded that no one will trouble or cause pain to another and all will live in peace and harmony in this domain of just and modest rule – *halemi raj*. [Living thus] God has liberated us all and we will no more have to struggle against disruptive forces trying to bring destruction and desolation to our inner self [body village].¹⁶ Undoubtedly both the visions capture the core of human yearning – to be able to live a life of piety in peace, harmony, safety and security among caring and sharing people.

Incarnation as a human being is considered a unique opportunity for the soul to unite with the divine. Sikhism therefore stresses for man to strive to achieve this sublime objective in this life even as living a full life - active, responsible, sharing, serving, caring and praying – totally committed to God's divine purpose that essentially calls for being a part of rather than withdrawn from God's manifest play. The highest goal is – *jiwan mukta* – liberated while alive, achieved by completely subordinating the individual willfulness – *haumain* – to the divine will. It is accepting a position of utter humility before God, love for and service of others, earning through honest endeavor and sharing God given bounty and staying in constant communion with the divine even as engaged in the mundane. The essence of control over individual will is not to lose the ability to act. On the other hand one must be able to energize and direct one's motivation to do what is right and not shirk from defending righteous causes, the weak and oppressed in an inclusive non-sectarian sense.

Equality before God of all humans is another important facet of inclusiveness of the Sikh faith. Traditionally the Indian society had been divided for centuries before along caste lines. One unfortunate aspect of this division had been that the

16. *eh hukam hoa mehrban da —eh hoa halemi raj jio* - [Sri Rag M V, p. 73].

lowest caste grouping was not even given the hope of salvation or liberation in their life unless they were to be born again in a higher caste group. The Gurus rejecting this notion declared that any one who heeds [and lives by] Nanak's teaching of devotion to the Lord's name can swim across the ocean separating the mortal from the divine - be he Khatri, Brahmin, Vaish or Shudra.¹⁷ Likewise the Gurus also proclaimed that such is the glory of [teachings of] the True Guru that men and women alike, living their lives as householders, can attain emancipation in the midst of children and spouses.¹⁸ Extending the concept of equality to the societal setting Nanak says that we should realize that all of us seek shelter under God and are God's own people as such let us not think of one another in terms of high, middle or low class or caste.¹⁹ In the same strain Kabir says that we, nay all the creation, have emanated from the same light that God created - who are we to judge others as high or low.²⁰ Nanak in fact goes far enough to say that to him none seems low; rather each one is noble for all are fashioned by the same potter and in each God's noble light shines.²¹

That the quality of human behavior is considered a mark of a person's religiosity is evident from Nanak placing truthful living above truth itself. The quote earlier from Arjan also reinforces the same concept [op. cit 12]. The living ethic preached by the Gurus aims at making the individual a social being who is productive, sharing and constructively involved with others.

17. *khātree barāahman̄ sood̄ vais sabh̄ aykai naam̄ t̄araanath. gur naanak up̄days kahaṭ̄ hai jo sunai so paar̄ paraanath* - [Maru M V, p. 1001].

18. *saṭgur kee aisee vadi-aa-ee. puṭar kalṭar vichay gaṭ̄ paa-ee* - [Dhanasri M I, p. 661].

19. *aey ji neh ham uttam, neech neh madham, har sarnagat har ke log* - [Gujri M I, p. 504].

20. *aval allah noor upaya kudrat ke sabh Bandai, ek noor te sabh jug upjeya kaun bhalai kon mandai* - [Parbhati Kabir, p.1349].

21. *sabh kau oocha akhiye neech neh deesai koey, ikna bhandai sajian ik channan the loey* - [Siri Rag M I, p. 62].

Such an individual believes that all humans are part of the same fraternity, has animus against none and cultivates harmonious relations with one and all.²² He is engaged with *sangat* – the community of devotees – that provides the anchor for his altruistic and spiritual pursuits. To this community all are welcome; none is excluded; and together they are all seeking Divine support to promote harmony and virtuous living among and around them. Engaged thus in active, yet altruistic and prayerful life, they are driven not by desire for recognition or wealth or even liberation but by the sheer intensity of their love for God²³ and if liberation comes to any of them, all associated with them will also get liberated.²⁴ Thus even the highest goal of liberation is not an individual accomplishment – it is shared with those who persevered with and facilitated the spiritual endeavor that received Divine approval – again a very unique concept of inclusive and collective human destiny.

The Gurus invariably prayed for the well being of one and all. Touched as they were by the sufferings and anxieties endured by the people, they were equally conscious that so much of discord and strife was caused in the name of promoting or protecting faith. Amar Das in his anguish pleads with God to shower His mercy and save this burning world through whichever door [path] it can be rescued.²⁵ Ram Das prays for God's merciful consideration of his supplication for God's blessings being showered on all beings in the world.²⁶ The daily Sikh prayers at homes and in Gurdwaras always end seeking that the well being of one and all be God's merciful will.²⁷

22. *neh kau bairi nehin begana sagal sang hum ko ban aayee* – [Kānra M V, p.1299].

23. *raj neh chahhon mukat neh chahoon man preet charan kamla re* – [Dev Gandhari M V, p. 534].

24. *aap tare sagle kul taarey* – [Dhanasri M I, p. 662].

25. *jagat jalanda rakh kai apni kirpa dhar, jit dharai ubhrai titlhai lai ubhar* – [Bilawal M III, p.853].

26. *kirpa kar ke sunno prabh sabh jag mehn varsai meh* – [Sorath M IV, p.652].

27. *tere bhanai sarbat ka bhala* – Ardas.

An exhaustive explication of the universal and inclusive in the Sikh teaching could be exhausting. My hope is that this brief analysis would indicate that notwithstanding its defined path, the Sikh theology has sufficient persuasive and consistent thought to promote the concept of a shared, inclusive and universal vision of the human destiny and living ethic. It enshrines within it all that we to day consider the fundamental human freedoms and rights so necessary for a fulfilling, meaningful life for each and every one of us. Let us now turn to Sikh historical experience to see the way these thoughts were shared through dialogue and other forms of engagements over the course of time.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Guru Nanak's life is a continuous chronicle of engagement and dialogue with leaders of other traditions. In fact he undertook several long and arduous journeys to seek them out and engage with them. A few examples would suffice. The Granth itself records in the composition called *sidh gosht*, in Guru's own words, [possibly youthful] Nanak's conversations in a - *sidh sabha* – formal dialogical setting with Sidhas.²⁸ The Guru answers their questions and explains his concept that renunciation and austerities are not essential for achieving salvation. The style is easy, persuasive and marked by exploratory forays by the Yogis to gauge depth of Nanak's thought and effort to persuade him to their ways. It is almost a model of classic theological discussion.

Another example seems to be two consecutive hymns by Nanak that end saying – *kaho nanak sun bhartar jogi* — says Nanak, listen Bhartari Jogi in Asa. The purport of the hymns is to explain Nanak's beliefs and persuasion in juxtaposition to the yogi's path. The second hymn ends expounding that the person who is imbued with the love of Lord's praises is the one who is the model of renunciation, the path of the yogi. Nanak therefore asks the Yogi, that he too should imbibe the

28. Ramkali M I, p. 938.

Lord's intoxicating nectar so that the purpose of his life [to achieve deliverance] is not lost playing the stakes of struggle in the process of living.²⁹ The style is engaging, vividly remonstrative of Nanak's love of *nam*, at once reaching the inner conscious of the listener.

There are a number of chronicles of Nanak's visits and his discussions with other faith traditions at Haridwar, Jagannath Puri, Meccā, Multan and several others places. The story at Multan, a seat of Muslim divines goes that as Nanak approached the city, the Muslim saints sent him a glass filled to the brim with milk symbolizing that Mohammed being the last Prophet, Muslims saw no place or role for another preceptor. Nanak placed a jasmine petal on the milk and sent it back symbolizing that while they were welcome to their cup of milk his purpose was only to add some fragrance to it from his side. Needless to say that he was received with warmth. None of his encounters are recorded to have ever ended up in futile debate, argument or disrespectful disengagement. His life became an example of persuasive, direct, and easy to understand interactions with people of diverse persuasions and with different levels of awareness and temperament giving rise to the popular saying – *nanak shah fakir hindu ka guru musalman ka pir* – Nanak the king among God's humble seekers, is Guru to Hindus and Pir to Muslims.

The succeeding Gurus carried this tradition forward. They continually engaged with the people and religious leaders of all persuasions in their missionaries. They opened their doors to all without any distinction and took positions on temporal issues of significance based on their righteous merits. Some of these positions exposed them to harsh responses leading to the martyrdom of the fifth and the ninth Masters but they did not deviate from the path of righteousness yet stayed open always to enter into a dialogue to alleviate societal tensions and to bring the erring to the path of love, prayer and

29. *siftee rataa sadh bairagee joey janam neh haarai, kahau nanak sun bharthhar jogi kheevan amrit dharai* – [Asa M I, 37/38, p. 359/360].

compassionate living. It is significant that successor Gurus to those martyred did not evince resentment against the perpetrating Mughal rulers – nor did the tenth Master turn vindictive when his infant sons were walled in alive. Instead he sent his missive *zafar nama* to Aurangzeb which when read by the King made him repentant and he invited the Guru to meet with him. The Guru graciously accepted his invite and set out to Aurangabad, a thousand miles to the South but Aurangzeb died while the Guru was on his way.

A chronicle going back to 1705 shows that the message of shared humanity and treating friend and foe alike was being imbibed by some. The Imperial army frequently invested Sikhs at Anandpur. After a day of skirmishes as the weary sun was going down, an old Sikh, Kanhaiya was tending the wounded of both sides and ministering sips of water to the thirsty. Seeing this the Sikhs were upset and asked Guru Gobind Singh to stop Kanhaiya from comforting the enemy. The Guru asked them to call him and ask - why? Brought before the Guru, Kanhaiya humbly said 'Lord you told us to recognize all human race as one.³⁰ When I go tending the wounded and I look at them I see your image in each of them. If you pervade in all, I see only you and no enemy!'

The institutions that the Gurus started also conveyed message of inclusive thought. None was excluded or not made welcome. No distinction was made because of reasons that were hitherto dividing or stratifying the society. Open entry to worship and community kitchen – *langar* – was an excellent example. Building of bathing pools with Gurdwaras and encouragement of sporting activities surrounding them were clear statements of importance of community hygiene and physical fitness. Association of women signaled involvement of children and families. The multi dimensional message thus expressed was that good, ethical, inclusive community living was conducive for spiritual progression. That there was virtuous merit in inclusive communal living caught the imagination of

30. *manas ki jat sabh ekay pehchanbo* – Dasam Granth.

the people and became its own strong message of inclusiveness at a time when the other models seen were withdrawn, exclusive or elitist.

There are several other happenings in History that provide evidence of the inclusive doctrines in practice. The tradition has it that the progeny of Nanak's companion Mardana continued to sing Guru's hymns in Guru's court for several generations. Arjan asked Mian Mir, a Sufi saint of Qadri *silsila* from Lahore to lay the corner stone of Harmandir Sahib. Guru Tegh Bahadur sacrificed his life willingly to protect the religious freedom of Hindus. Through the 18th century Sikhs waged a relentless struggle against foreign invaders whose sole purpose seemed to be to loot and kidnap hapless civilians – be they men, women or children. Maharaja Ranjit Singh for the first time in several centuries brought the turbulent frontier region under control stopping further invasions and thus enabling a more peaceful pursuit of life for the population in the region.

Whilst there is overwhelming evidence of the Gurus engaging with Hindus and Muslims, there are references in Granth or other chronicles of Gurus conversations with Buddhists, Jains and several other sects current at the time. An early recorded account indicative of Christian-Sikh contact is by a Jesuit priest Fr Jerome Xavier who on Sep. 25, 1606 wrote from Lahore about Guru Arjan Dev's murder by torture saying "In that way their good Pope died, overwhelmed by the suffering, torments and dishonors." It is likely that over time more resources will come to light bringing greater clarity to the nature of such contacts and the perceptions flowing from them.

Sikh conversations with the Christians took more definitive shape as the British gained control over the Northern-Indian plains. Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who ruled the area now mainly constituting Pakistan, is recorded to have invited the first American missionary, Rev. John C Lowrie from Philadelphia, who came to Ludhiana in 1834 for an audience with him at his court in Lahore for a discussion on Christian faith and beliefs. Subsequent to the British annexation of the Sikh kingdom in

1849 some initial attempts at European understanding of Sikhism e.g. by Dr Ernest Trumpp were superficial and seen by Sikhs as disparaging. Later at the turn of century Max Arthur Macauliffe produced his six volume account of Sikhism, its history, thought and translation of some compositions from Guru Granth Sahib that were considered well founded by the Sikhs. Over the last century there have been several attempts by missionaries, scholars, theologians, historians and others to engage with the Sikhs. Some of these efforts have been productive in promoting mutual respect and understanding but examples of judgmental commentaries are also not lacking.

CONTEMPORARY SITUATION

Contemporaneously societies are getting increasingly polarized along religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and other differences. In this environment, minority segments often find themselves placed at high risk for remote acts associated with some in their group. As such creating empathetic awareness about various faiths has become an important necessity for ensuring peace, stability and harmony in mixed societies. Sikh experience has shown their acute vulnerability, underscoring importance of the need to create humane understanding about them and debunking their negative stereotypes. This is amply borne out by the problems faced by them in post Sep. 11 America as it was in the post '84 India. Sikhs also could and did laugh over some stereotypes a few years back but today the same tit bits can unwittingly become tools for creating and increasing mistrust and prejudice.

That we have to work proactively and do more to try and create empathetic awareness about ourselves will be evident from some of the examples that follow. At a recent conference in Europe with multi faith participation an activist scholar from Germany told me that I was the first Sikh he had met in Dialogue. Vice Rector of Sofia University who had been friends with Ambassador Robeiro [Police Officer brought to Punjab in '80's to control Sikh militancy], told me that even though he

had visited India a couple of times and passed through Punjab to go to Dharamsala to pursue his special interest in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition he never had an encounter with Sikhs. A scholar from Indonesia came up to me and quizzed 'Muslim?' I said 'No, Sikh.' He again said 'Hindu?' I repeated 'No, Sikh.' We both were, no doubt, embarrassed by the way our conversation opened. I also am reminded of the comment by a Pakistani participant in a Lahore meeting that given that Sikhs are the fifth largest faith in the world – and given the origin of their faith in Pakistan – how come Pakistanis know so little about Sikhs and Sikhism.

It would be wrong to think that the picture is entirely bleak. There are positives to share too. Prabhakri Devi, Director, Vedic Foundation, Austin, Texas told me at a seminar at Rutgers University in New Jersey that she thought the Sikh response to the incidents of hate crimes against them post Sep. 11 was very restrained, dignified, thoughtful and seemed very well coordinated. Knowing that our response really came from the gut - there was no co-ordination - and if it was seen to be appropriate then we could justifiably take comfort in our individual as well as collective maturity; a gratifying yet humbling thought. Heidi Hadsell, President of Hartford Seminary told me how very impressed she was by the Sikh presence and altruistic food service for thousands of the delegates and visitors through the five day Barcelona World Religions Parliament earlier that year. Several people at Istanbul came up to me and said they were glad to meet me again after Barcelona – even though I had not been to the Parliament. But the visage I presented possibly corresponded to the favorable images left by those who were there.

My sense is that while there are some shining examples here and there the task is too large and too important to be just left to individual initiatives alone. We have to bring back the zeal and commitment of our Gurus and generations of Sikhs in the post-Guru period to continue to share the message of love, sharing and prayer with others. We seem to have

become rather withdrawn and inwardly turned. At the same time it seems that, in the contemporary global setting, the major traditions possibly do not have any compelling reasons to engage with or to understand Sikhism [except in India]. Media, academia, scholars and theologians of other faiths have shown little inclination to invest time and effort to understand Sikhs or their faith. Sikhs also have displayed little potential to excite interest or curiosity by attention grabbing accomplishments or even negatively by rabble rousing or causing trouble.

With confluence of these factors Sikhs need to carefully and effectively use their limited resources to achieve more empathetic and meaningful engagement with the other. My sense after years of involvement in inter faith activity is that conversations to grasp and reconcile the doctrinal positions and historical experiences at various levels between the Semitic traditions have helped and there is a certain degree of optimism at the progress, albeit slow, that has been made. This mode of engagement does have certain limitations for non-Semitic faiths in the Diaspora. While some such conversations do take place within the cloistered environment of inter faith groups and committees, their impact on the way the lay people are informed about any tradition is very limited. We tend to be talking to the converted or ourselves. There is no mechanism that I have witnessed of getting the message of mutual respect and reassurance developed through these encounters out to the public to counter those who may be spreading prejudicial thoughts.

I would therefore suggest that the Diaspora Sikhs recognize that their need is likely to be answered better through an activist inter faith agenda. They should proactively associate with such initiatives that help bring empathetic awareness of the inclusive and universal in their belief system to the mainstream. In India we must seriously engage Hindus and Muslims in multi dimensional, multi level and multi disciplinary dialogue on the lines of Christian, Jewish and Muslim dialogue in the West. This is an urgent necessity in view of the continuing religious strife, deep sense of mutual mistrust and feeling of

hurt nurtured by transmitted historical memory. The effort can progressively be extended to engage the other faiths.

We should also engage constructively alongside other faiths on issues that are of shared concern, wherever we are, at the community, national or global levels. At the same time we need to create or restructure existing organizations everywhere to be able to voice our views; protect our rights and rightful positions in the community; showcase our heritage and culture; and engage in and promote conversations to the extent we can. For doing this we will have to step outside of Gurdwaras; spot and nurture those who may be able to contribute to these endeavors; encourage them to make time to get involved and provide institutional support to launch and keep such initiatives going.

CONCLUDING

The Sikh experience over the last half century has had its share of successes and traumas. We have lived through the travails of '47, '84 and Sep.11 without losing proverbial élan so characteristic of us. The insular mode in which we find ourselves today is against our gregarious nature. Let us bring ourselves into our instinctively open, accepting, and inclusive way of life. Let us this anniversary, do what we can in spirit of true altruism and bring the message of prayer for well being of the entire creation enshrined in the Granth to as many as we can. Let us bring it to them in humility. Let us bring it to them in a manner they can relate to. Thus only the inclusive and universal in the Granth, the Guru's engaging style, their vision of shared human heritage of wisdom and of - *halemi raaj* or *be gam pura* - a civil society rooted in justice, equality and liberty and governed by principles of empathy, understanding and modesty will have a chance to be more widely known, understood and may be some day reflected in the way people live their lives.

Let us get therefore get constructively involved wherever we are in, whatever capacity we can and do something - and believe me there is a lot that needs done!

CONTENTMENT IN SEARCH OF INNER PEACE A LOOK AT SIKH & MUSLIM THOUGHT

INTRODUCTORY

People everywhere, in spite of major improvements in their standard of living and economic condition display a marked sense of dissatisfaction with their position. Every person is seeking more and more irrespective of the need. Possession and acquisition seem to have become more important than use or utility. The global earth's resources are being put to tremendous strain and there is rising concern if the acquisitive, consumerist culture characteristic of the present times may not in fact cause major harm to the prospects of sustainability as also of human quest for peace and tranquility.

This commentary is not characteristic only of the materialistic quest of human beings. The same behavior is evidenced in pursuit of other desires – be those motivated by the inherent instincts or by the sensory drives. The societies therefore are experiencing increasing levels of tension, divisiveness and alienation.

These social issues and their moral underpinnings were always considered important and caused the sages and seers to think and ponder over them through the ages. Almost half a millennium earlier, Nanak and successor Sikh Gurus made extensive comments on these tendencies in their compositions included in the Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Guru Nanak has reflected on the transformation in human disposition

and preferred lead instinct or social ethos for their pursuit through the Indian mythical four ages of human experience.¹ In summary it could be presented as below:

Age Name	Duration Yrs	Disposition	Social Ethos
Sat yug	172,000	Contentment	Righteousness
Tretha yug	1,296,000	Self-restraint	Perseverance
Dwapar yug	864,000	Austerity	Purity
Kal yug	432,000	Flaming desire	Falsehood

According to this mythical calendar we are presently in the early fourth millennium of the fourth age – a total period of over two million years. The transition of human disposition from a state of contentment to flaming desire stands out as progressive erosion – controlled initially by self-restraint and then by more severe discipline of denial and austerity before complete capitulation in the contemporary age. The social ethos has likewise changed from righteous motivation to falsehood.

For the Muslim thought we have drawn upon the extensive writings and commentary by Said Nursi, a staunch believer who lived through and resisted transformation of Turkey to a secular society. He has made frequent references to similar concerns in his writings and has expressed his view candidly when he says "Western Civilization has not truly heeded the revealed religion, it has both impoverished man and increased his needs. It has destroyed the principle of frugality and contentment and increased wastefulness, greed and covetousness. It has opened up the way to tyranny and what is unlawful. Through encouraging people to take advantage of the means of dissipation, it has also cast those needy unfortunates into total laziness. It has destroyed the desire for effort and work. It has encouraged depravity and dissipation and wasted their lives on useless things. Furthermore it has

1. *asa* M I, p. 470.

made those needy and lazy people ill. Through abuse and prodigality, it has been the means of spreading a hundred sort of diseases."²

We thus have two visions here – one expressing deep concern at what is happening in the consumerist world today and the other a macro view of the erosion in ethico-spiritual values over the ages. Both these visions have a confluence in that these address erosion in the moral basis of value system of our times with contentment seemingly being a primal ethical value underpinning this phenomenon.

CONTENTMENT IN GURBANI

At the close of Sikh scripture, Guru Arjan Dev who compiled the holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib summed up essence of its contents by saying "In this salver are placed three things: Divine Truth, Contentment and Divine Wisdom. Added is the nectar of Lord's Name, support and sustainer of all. All who partake of and relish this will get deliverance. Keep it always close to your heart and let it not be forsaken says Nanak, for tied to the Lord's feet [His Word] you will swim across this vast expanse."³

That contentment is one of the three virtues identified as important is observed in several other verses too. For example the Guru says that the most excellent way of life is to practice truth, contentment and compassion.⁴ In yet another verse the message is that truth, contentment and heightened awareness is achieved through listening.⁵ There are other examples like letting truth, contentment and restraint be your guides;⁶ and

2. The Damascus Sermon/A Letter, p.130.

3. *thal vich tin vastoo paeo sat santokh veecharo. amrit naam thakur kaa paio jis ka sabhas adharo. je ko khavai je ko bhunchai tis ka hoey udharo. eh vasat tajej nah jae nit nit rakh ur dharo. tam sansar charan lag tareeai sabh nanak barahm pasaro* - Mundavani M V, p. 1429.

4. *sat santokh daya kamavey eho karni saar* - Sri Rag M V, p.51.

5. *suniye sat santokh gyan* - Japji Pauri 10.

6. *sat santokh sanjam hai nal* - Ramkali M I, p. 939.

truth, contentment and intuitive peace are obtained from the revealed Word.⁷ That it occurs in conjunction with truth so often would further reinforce its importance in the Sikh thought.

The multi dimensional attributes surrounding the concept of contentment and influencing its importance become evident as we proceed further. In another verse the Guru is asking to be blessed with contentment so that his mind thus made receptive lets Lord's name dwell within and become his support.⁸ Thus contentment is seen to have an enabling role for spiritual advancement. At another place the Guru says that the first endeavor of a devotee should be to be subsumed with the Lord's praises and next seek to be in a state of contentment⁹ - clearly indication of a symbiotic relation where causality is shared with God's name itself.

Nanak commends that we should think of contentment as the father and wisdom as the mother¹⁰ the two relationships that mould, inspire and are role models for the most. The level of appreciation for contentment is further raised when the Guru says that those whom God chooses to unite with Him get immersed in contentment.¹¹ Guru Arjan also says that the person on whom the Lord casts His merciful glance is blessed with truth, contentment, understanding and contemplation, is always subsumed with the nectar of God's name and is continuously engrossed singing His praises. He has gone past the worldly difficulties and pain. God chooses such people to unite with Himself that He likes and they are the ones acceptable as genuine in God's court.¹²

7. *sach santokh sehaj such bani poorey gur tey pavaneya* - Majh M III, p. 115.

8. *deh dan santokhia sacha nam miley adhar* - Malar M I, p.1286.

9. *aval sift dooji saboori* - Maroo M V, p.1084.

10. *mata mat pita santokh* - Gauree M I, p.223.

11. *jin kau tum har melo soami te naey santokh gur sara* - Bilawal M IV, p.799.

12. *sat santokh gian dhian piare jis naun nadar karey, andin kirtan gun ravey amrit poor bharey, dukh sagar tin langeya piarey bhavjal par parey, jis bhavey tis mel leyay piare soi sada kharey* - Sorath M V, p.641.

Contentment continues in its upward trajectory when Nanak says that the abode of truth, contentment and bliss is beyond the abode of gods¹³ and that contentment, faith and tolerance, are the sustenance of angels.¹⁴ At yet another place he says that the creation is held in balance by righteousness, compassion and rectitude [contentment].¹⁵ Not just that, the bard who sang the Guru's praises, picked truth and contentment as defining virtues that made him the Guru¹⁶ the closest association the concept is given to the Divine.

That contentment is a mark of the person at a very high level of spiritual progression is stressed. Nanak says that the devotion of the contented ones is accepted for they avoid evil ways and live by righteous and honest means. Freed from material attachment and worldly bondage their living is guided by moderation. They remember and reflect on the True Lord alone.¹⁷ Using the metaphor of *sati* Guru Amardas says that those who live in contentment and modesty and rising every morning remember and serve God, the true consort, are *satis* - not those who immolate with the husband.¹⁸

Thus we see that contentment is ranked very high in Sikh values and its associated attributes include truth; compassion; faith; tolerance; wisdom; moderation; modesty; heightened awareness; restraint; intuitive peace; righteousness; freedom from attachment; remembering and serving God; understanding; avoiding evil influences; living by honest means; contemplation.

13. *sat santokh ulas shakat neh seo hai* - Bhai Gurdas, Var 3.

14. *sidak saboori sadhika sabar thosa malaeyaka* - Sri Rag M I, p.83.

15. *dhaul dharma daya ka poot, santokh thap rakheya jin soot* - Japji Pauri 16.

16. *gur gam parman the paeyo sat santokh grahaj leyo* - Bhat Kal Svaiye M V, p.1392.

17. *sev kiti santokhiyee jinni sacho sach dheyaia, unni mandey paer neh rakheo kar sukrit dharam kamaya, unni duniya taure bandhna an pani thaura khaya* - asa di var, pauri 7.

18. *bhi so satian janian seel santokh rahan, sevan sahibapna nit uthh sanmalan* - Var Sorath, M III, p.787.

DISCUSSION/COMMENTARY

As we proceed further it may be instructive for us to reflect on the Sikh thought and what some Sikh scholars have said on the concepts surrounding contentment.

Harbans Singh¹⁹ says that an essential feature of Sikh thought consists in reconciliation of worldly pursuits with the higher spiritual values providing a balanced approach. The faith affirms fundamental and necessary material pursuits and calls them pious.²⁰ Satisfaction of basic needs is even seen as a pre-requisite for spiritual advancement lest they prove a hurdle.²¹ In balance the Sikh thought does not favor a life of poverty²² nor of sensual pleasures though if a choice were to be made, poverty is preferred over unfair and immoral means.²³ The concept is means oriented aimed at harmoniously contributing to well integrated human life consciously directed to the ultimate goal of God realization.

Sohan Singh²⁴ argues that Nanak's thought discloses an interrelationship between contentment and – *dharam* – social order, in his interpretation. His view is that in *japji* Nanak implies that social order [*dharma*] is holding men together through a string of contentment. Again [in *asa ki var* quoted earlier] Nanak identifies contentment as the human disposition and *dharma* as the social ethos. Sohan Singh sees here contentment and social order as the individual and social condition of one and the same moral phenomenon. He further argues that since

19. *Sikh Value System and Social Change*, p. 66+, Patiala, 1995.

20. *khana pina pavitr hai ditan rijak sanbahey* – Asa M I, p.472.

21. *bhookhe bhagat neh kijey, yeh mala apni lijey* – Kabir, p. 656 — *maan mangoon taan mangoon dhan lakhmi sut deh* – p.1308.

22. *jis greha bahun tisey griha chinta, jis griha thori so phirey bharamanta, dohi bivastha te jo mukta sohi suhela bhaliye* – p.1019.

23. *santan ka dana sookha so sarab nidhan, griha sakat chhatee parkar te bikh saman* – p. 811.

24. In *Perspectives on Guru Nanak*, Harbans Singh [ed], 1990, Punjabi University, Patiala, p.158 ff.

Nanak also identifies *dharmā*²⁵ as the first stage of a man's spiritual ascent, to be *dharmic*, a man must be contented because unbridled desire would be disruptive of social order. A contented person is accepting of and effective at performing his role in society thus maintaining a desirable social order.

Avtar Singh considers wisdom a fundamental virtue that plays a key role in Sikh ethics. The other virtues considered are truthfulness, temperance, courage, justice, humility and contentment. He believes that the socially active and spiritually enhancing way of life persuaded by the Gurus may become demanding and therefore to keep stress and frustrations in balance the virtue of contentment becomes integral to the Sikh moral system. He sees *santokh* [calmness] and *vairag* [renunciation] as two options to a person when faced with disappointment with the results of effort and considers contentment as the one that though more difficult, would enable renewed effort and continued resolve. He defines contentment as "studiously cultivated state of mind, which acts as a safety valve in human personality in contradistinction to the ascetic choice."²⁶

Mansukhani places Truth as the highest virtue in Sikhism. His understanding of Truth includes righteousness, sincerity, honesty, uprightness, frankness, justice, impartiality et al that "give rise to mutual trust and respect." Contentment comes

25. In the author's view *dharmā* in Sikh thought is a multi dimensional concept whose core meanings and dimensions include persuasion/faith, code of conduct, duty/role, balancing/harmonizing force, justice, honesty, righteousness and merit. Some other attributes that bear on its core concept include virtues and qualities such as purity, contentment, compassion, truthfulness, self-restraint, forbearance, austerity, continence, as well as prayerful, meditative disposition and refined intellect [wisdom], control of evil propensities and well-directed personal will. One may therefore infer that such attributes along with *dharm*, in its multi-dimensional meaning, form the paradigm that informs a person's propensities for action choices and thus his potential for spiritual advancement. For a detailed discussion see the paper "Dharti, Dharm & Dhur".

26. Ethics of the Sikhs, Punjabi University, Patiala, 1996, chapter IV, p.120.

next and he sees it as feeling satisfied with what one has and thus free from greed, envy and jealousy. A contented mind is able to better adjust to adversity like sickness, sorrow, poverty or distress and is in fact always full of gratitude and joy. He commends the traditional wisdom of looking at the less fortunate to be contented.²⁷ [There is a broad spectrum of disagreement with this passive characterization of contentment as not consistent with the activist approach of the Sikh Gurus.]

Without attempting any hierarchy of virtues Wazir Singh²⁸ starts with wisdom. His concept of wisdom implies thoughtful and rational disposition; intellect and wise learning; reason and pondering over the essence. Contentment comes next and he sees it as indispensable for excellence of individual life and as an enabling virtue for altruistic activity. A contented person, he believes, will choose suffering over dishonor.

Santokh Singh²⁹ interprets *mundavani* [quoted earlier] thus — “man through continuous reflection — can attain a state of detachment leading to a state of contentment — which in turn leads him to the attainment of Truth — provided [he is] — reflecting — meditating — with love and devotion on — the ultimate reality.” For him the import of — *santokh* — is much more than contentment; it includes temperance, patience, detachment and surrender to the will of God.

Saran Singh³⁰ says, “Moral discipline must underpin our faith. Every one is expected to exercise restraint and never to overstep the limit of contentment — trying to get more than one needs — deserves — is — self defeating — demeaning and antisocial — only a discerning and disciplined mind can draw the line at contentment — where the need ends and indulgence begins.”

27. The Quintessence of Sikhism, SGPC, 1997, p. 147-153.

28. The Sikh Vision, Ess Ess Publications, New Delhi, 1992, p. 81-3.

29. Philosophical Foundations of the Sikh Value System, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1982, p. 77 ff.

30. Sikh Bulletin, April-May, 2004.

CONTENTMENT - HOW OBTAINED

The Gurus recognize that it is not easy to achieve contentment for it comes at a very high stage of a person's ethical and spiritual evolution. At the plane of material needs poverty, want, deprivation could be major sources for lack of contentment. The Guru however says that it is not necessary for a person to be well provided to be content. Verily desire has not been satisfied in even the mightiest kings and warriors.³¹ On the other hand one may be able to achieve peace and contentment in a life of penury – grinding corn and wearing coarse garments.³² As a practical faith Sikhs are enjoined to live their lives as householders. Denials and austerities are not commended but moderation is. The message is that sense of fulfillment comes if one is content.³³

Be forgiving. It promotes a sense of accommodation for human failings and gives one the sagacity to forgive errors and omissions by others and in fact help them to improve. The forgiving person promotes empathy and understanding - conducive to his own attainment of calm and contented disposition.³⁴

The Gurus have continuously stressed the importance of the company of the virtuous as a tool for spiritual development and in fact even for prayer. The reasons for this persuasion are several but certainly sharing the experiences with others can help develop a more mature understanding of life and its vicissitudes. Isolation, asceticism and withdrawal may encourage denial and austerities but association with the virtuous would encourage contentment.³⁵

Serving the Lord, which in effect is serving others, is encouraged to achieve peace, tranquility, humility and contentment. The spirit of service is again a gauge of a person's

31. *vadey vadey rajan aur bhuman ki ichh neh bhujee.*

32. *peesan pees oadh kamree such man sntokhaey* – Suhi M V, p.745.

33. *bina santokh nahin ko rajai.*

34. *khima gahi bart seel santokh* – Gauri M I, p.223.

35. *sangat kar santokh man paiya* – Ramkali M V, p.889.

relationship with the community – his recognition that there is so much that one can do to help others. It brings one the comfort of a calm and contented disposition.³⁶

Lust, anger, greed, attachment and haughtiness are five evil tendencies repeatedly mentioned in the Sikh thought as the source of human ills and suffering. Controlling these tendencies is the most important inner struggle that a man wages for his spiritual progression. The persuasion is that consuming these will lead to contentment.³⁷

In a similar vein the control of sense organs [aural, speech, vision, touch, smell] is also commended because a lot of choices made by us are guided by the way these senses influence our thinking. Such control, says the Guru, will bless the practitioner with virtues of forgiveness, patience and contentment.³⁸

Love, truth, humility and virtuous living enable the seed of *nam* to sprout and subsumed with the love of the Lord, the person lives in God's will and attains contentment. The heart of the person is now at peace and open for the Lord to abide within.³⁹

Gurus commend *gurbani*, the Guru's word as an inspiration for obtaining contentment.⁴⁰ The Gurus stress that mere repeated readings of scriptures will not bring contentment for the flame of desire may continue to consume the person's days and nights.⁴¹ The longings and desires are only controlled when the Word dwells within and one internalizes and lives by the persuasion.⁴²

36. *satgur sev sada such paieyseel santokh sabh taha ley* – Maru M III, p.1057.

37. *bhakh ley hoey saboori* – Bhairon Kabir, p. 1158.

38. *indri panch panchey vas aaney khima santokh gurnat paavey*, Parbhati M III, p.1334.

39. *har ras pi santokh hoa sach vasya man aaye* – Bilawal M III, p.850.

40. *sach santokh sehaj such bani poorey gur te pavaneya* – Majh M III, p.115.

41. *parh thaakey santokh neh aaeo andin jalat vihaey* – Sorath M III, p.647.

42. *mansa asa sabad jalaey* – Ramkali M I, p.940.

NURSI'S VISION OF WHAT IS/IS NOT CONTENTMENT

The thoughts of the Said on frugality and contentment are addressed in some detail in his 19th Flash. The treatise begins with the verse "Eat and drink, but waste not by excess"⁴³ and his thrust stems from viewing human behavior through the prism of contentment and frugality versus greed, wastefulness and desire.

Contentment and frugality appear together in Nursi's writings at several places indicating a strong associated relationship. The other virtues given a high place in the paradigm of associated virtues include thankfulness; moderation in actions, words, speech, conduct and consumption.

He believes that contentment is acceptance of results of one's labor and fate. Being contented strengthens the wish to strive and increases enthusiasm. On the other hand fatalistic acceptance of one's lot indicates lack of enterprising spirit in the individual. This is not commended.⁴⁴

Nursi makes distinction between sustenance for survival and sustenance/provisions for needs arising from desires but acquiring the appearance of necessity. His view is that human body is so designed that its needs for sustenance are small and the Creator takes care of such needs for humans as also for the other beings in the creation.

The humans have to strive regards their other desires and perceived necessities, though God may bless each individual to a varying degree. What the Said seems to be saying is that individuals should make their life an example of living in balance in relation to these desires. He draws on the example set by the Prophet who was always guided by moderation in speech, eating, drinking and avoidance of excess, negligence, wastefulness and prodigality.⁴⁵

His view is that frugality is the means to achieve contentment. In fact the two have a symbiotic relationship -

43. Qur'an, 7:31.

44. Letters/Seeds of Reality, 95, p.552.

45. The Flashes/11th Flash, p.93.

one who is content is frugal; and one who is frugal, finds the blessing of plenty.⁴⁶ He emphasizes that frugality and contentment are in conformity with Divine wisdom and argues that nature has stayed stable through the ages because there is no futility and wastefulness in it. This is due to the inherent balance and equilibrium in creation. Divine wisdom therefore commands frugality and it is the most basic principle in the universe.⁴⁷ One may argue here that this seems true only at the macro systemic level over extended periods of time for there is seen enough waste and imbalance in the sub sets of natural phenomenon in the short term. The credible inference therefore is that Nursi is suggesting frugality as a life long commitment and not a short-term panacea for itinerant problems.

Thus if we exercise control over desires, are moderate in consumption, are not wasteful and are thankful for His blessings, our lives would be closer to the balance intended in nature. In that setting "frugality — [is] a form of worship and active prayer for sustenance."⁴⁸ This then becomes a life of worship made prayerful through practice of frugality. I take frugality to imply control over desires.

He takes pains to explain that being frugal is not being mean and stingy though the frugal are sometimes thus stereotyped. His view is that frugality imparts dignity and generosity to a person. By an example from his own life he emphasizes, "Perhaps those who saw this conduct of mine [of restrained rate of consumption] thought it was stinginess and my brother's conduct for three nights [of rapid consumption to finish] was generosity. But in point of fact I saw that concealed beneath the apparent stinginess lay an elevated dignity, increase and plenty and great reward."⁴⁹

Nursi also clarifies that the characterization of any conduct

46. 23rd Letter, p.334.

47. The Flashes/30th Flash/The Divine Name, p.401.

48. The Rays/The Supreme Sign, p.195.

49. 19th Flash, p.194.

has to be judged based on the circumstances and cites the example of Abdullah b Umar, one of seven companions of the Prophet. When asked "O Imam? Solve this difficulty for me! In the market you did that while in your house you did this," Abdullah replied that he haggled over small change in the market because prudence in the market place is customary and he was not being stingy. Likewise it was not immoderate to give gold coins to the poor at home but only an expression of compassion for the needy. He only did what was the right and appropriate thing in either setting.⁵⁰

In defense of practice of frugality he suggests "[it is] – a source of happiness and pleasure – contentment and licit living." Frugality in consumption and being content makes life easier and being thankful, one does not seek approbation and is more independent. He has high self-esteem; is not beholden to others and is thus less likely to be compromised. He also emphasizes that a consequence of contentment is better standing in the community as the Hadith says, "*The contented person is respected, and the greedy person despised.*"

Nursi is passionate about contentment and frugality and emphasizes that their practice ensures one's life and sustenance more than salary and any unlawful money received would do.⁵¹ It is health giving for the body, a cause for self respect, powerful means of experiencing the pleasure to be found in bounties, cause of dignity and distinction⁵² a very strong endorsement indeed.

Obviously Nursi has strong views on excess, wastefulness and greed. He believes that excess and waste is antithetical to contentment, causes laziness and breeds hypocritical behavior. Becoming slave to taste and pleasure is the cause of so much illness.⁵³ Greed causes anxiety and tension and makes man jealous and envious. His advice is that if you love wealth; seek

50. 19th Flash, p.195.

51. 8th Letter, p.490.

52. 19th Flash, p.189/193.

53. The Flashes/19th Flash, p.190.

it not with greed but with contentment, so that you may have it [or it seems to be] in abundance.⁵⁴

In this paradigm of frugality-based contentment Nursi seems to leave some room for indulgence. Citing Shaykh Geylani he says that individuals may enjoy delicacies, when "one's spirit rules his body, and his heart rules the desires of his soul, and his reason rules his stomach and he wants pleasure for the sake of offering thanks." The important thing is to have control over desires, and imbibe God's bounties in a spirit of thankfulness.

One more interesting comment before we move to the next part. The Biography Of Nursi describes how through "the abundance resulting from frugality and contentment", the Said had been able to provide for the needs of twenty, thirty, and sometimes sixty students without breaking his principle of self-sufficiency. This to me is reflective of the merits of a shared communal sense of contentment that can be a great boon for social cohesion and calm in adverse situations.

HOW OBTAINED

We have seen earlier that the most commended method for achieving contentment is through the practice of frugality. This entails control over desires and being guided by moderation. Over time the discipline of frugality may succeed in generating a state of contentment.

Being true to one's belief helps. The true believers in Islam are aware of their poverty before God and beseech Him for the gift of thankfulness for what they have, and to be content.⁵⁵ Contentment with the Divine decree and submission to Divine Determining is a mark of Islam.⁵⁶

Trust in God leads to contentment and is the means to God's mercy. He cites the example of trees and plants that remain rooted 'contentedly' in one place and God sends

54. Letters / Twenty - Second Letter - Second Topic- p.322.

55. The Words / Seventh Word - p.43.

56. Letters / Seventeenth Letter - p.100.

sustenance to them as against animals who pursue their food 'greedily', and for this reason are able to attain it only imperfectly.⁵⁷ One can debate the state of consciousness of the two and their choice options but the example does convey an important message in its own way.

When asked the question how did he live without working Nursi's answer was that he lived through frugality and the resulting plenty. Some of his examples may even suggest heavenly intervention like finding a loaf of bread atop a tree at the top of the mountain at a time of dire need when he had a guest. He does display steadfastness in being frugal and unfaltering faith in the Divine.⁵⁸

Nursi also suggests that to be content one should inculcate the quality of preferring others to oneself without demanding or inwardly desiring any material reward. Such people are contented and it is for them that it is said "They prefer others to themselves, though poverty be their lot."⁵⁹

In another context Nursi says, "Physical misfortunes grow when they are seen to be large, and shrink when they are seen to be small — if one gives physical misfortunes great importance, they will cause anxiety — on which the outward misfortune fastens to perpetuate itself. But if the anxiety is removed by contentment — the physical misfortune will gradually decrease, dry up and vanish."⁶⁰ So much of it is in the mind — controlling emotions helps.

Patience also helps as Nursi says — "if you have intelligence, grow accustomed to contentment and try to be satisfied with little. If you cannot endure it — seek patience — do not complain — if you have to complain, then complain about your soul — for fault is its."⁶¹

One could become contented looking at the example of

57. Letters / Twenty - Second Letter - p.321.

58. Rays, p.462/ 16th letter, p. 88/90.

59. Qur'an 59:90.

60. The Flashes / The Second Flash - p.27.

61. The Letters/24th Letter, p.338.

another. To wit Nursi's advice to women - if it is your fate to have a husband who is unsuitable for you, be content with your fate and resigned to it. God willing, he will be reformed through your contentment and resignation.⁶²

Nursi also has a warning for us and reminds us of the saying: "The eye of contentment is blind to faults." So if one is content with the state of his consciousness he will not see its faults or admit to them, and seek forgiveness. Such contentment is counter-productive and one should not want it.⁶³

BRINGING VISIONS TOGETHER – IN SUM

Bringing the two visions together, contentment is a calm yet buoyant disposition that encourages belief in progress and motivates a person to strive, with humility, in conviction that one is doing one's best. The person accepts both success and failure calmly. Failure does not disturb his inner calm - it rather motivates him to strive again and harder.

Attainment of contentment involves transcendence of willfulness and inherent evil instincts. It is morally driven and makes no compromise with evil. Taking away the frustrations of worldly life it inculcates satisfaction, happiness and equipoise.

Contentment does not consist in accepting present situation without making effort for improvement in human condition. It is not fatalistic acceptance of poverty, hunger and privations without effort at their removal. It is not accommodation with lethargy, inaction or defeatism.

The contented are free of fear, despair, guile and viciousness. They are men of hope and peace perseveringly continuing effort for human welfare. They have abiding trust in the justness of God and His grace. They believe in the triumph of God given bounty and righteousness – *degheh, tegh fateh* - and inspired by forward-looking optimism – *chardi kala* - they seek the good of one and all – *sarbat da bhala*. They are not content just to be content!

62. The Flashes / The Twenty-Fourth Flash - p.264.

63. The Flashes / The Thirteenth Flash - p.124.

SOCIETAL PEACE & HARMONY - SIKH PRECEPTS & SOME REFLECTIONS ON SIKH ENGAGEMENT WITH NEIGHBORING PAKISTAN

INTRODUCTORY

Through the ages, all sages, savants, prophets, *avtars* and gurus have pondered the prevalence of conflict in their times and strived to share and spread their message of love, peace and harmony. Guru Nanak and successor Sikh Gurus also were deeply touched by the suffering of people that they witnessed - emanating from deeply entrenched historical discriminatory practices sanctioned by the prevailing dominant faith as also the ambition and struggle for power and dominance by local Rajas and foreign invaders. The sufferers in either case were the people - mainly the poor, weak and underprivileged though when major battles took place even the high and mighty could not escape the wrath of those more powerful.

Our lives continue to be haunted by frequent eruption of conflict at various levels in society. Unfortunately the twentieth century which brought the greatest improvement in material well being of large segments of humanity also saw an accentuation of the divide along political, economic, racial, ethnic, religious and cultural lines and was marked by the highest number of deaths in history because of conflict. In this backdrop talking about societal peace and harmony makes for good sense though I would at the same time ask us to recognize that if generating peace and harmony was as simple as producing

corn and milk we would have accomplished it by this time in the history of mankind.

Having said that let me quickly add that while I may present the lofty principles and talk of possibilities during our discussion, my call for action, if it could be termed that would be limited to what may be good for and not far from reach of those involved closely in these deliberations. I may therefore dwell a lot upon you and us i.e. Pakistan and Sikhs.

MY NOSTALGIC LINK

I have visited Pakistan twice since my family left here in the aftermath of partition of the then British India in August 1947. My first visit, in Jan 2004, was with a group of scholars from the US at the invitation of Quran Academy and certain other Institutions. We had a three-day round table with Dr Israr Ahmed and a fruitful evening with Suheyl Umar and some other eminent scholars at the Iqbal Academy in Lahore followed by some more time in Islamabad and Rawal Pindi at the Institute of Policy Studies, International Islamic University, Islamic Research Institute and Christian Study Center.¹

Earlier when growing up, I had spent a year at F C College in Lahore after schooling in Delhi and had loved the experience. My family was from Rawal Pindi and I had spent several summers in those parts and its enchanting memories were etched in my mind. For me therefore the experience was instructive, interesting and also deeply emotional - a sort of closure to many memories, thoughts and feelings lying buried inside of me for so long - not going away nor seeking an expression.

Considering its proud heritage of learning and wisdom; its being witness to so much glory as well strife in its long and tortuous history and its distinguished place in Sikh history and historical memory, this part of the world has a special significance for Sikhs further sharpened by my personal nostalgic

1. For a comprehensive account see: Nirmal Singh, *Indo-Pak Amity: A Sikh Perspective* in two parts, *Sikh Review*, Feb and Mar 2005 issues.

link. I therefore do sense some relevance to linking the subject of societal peace and harmony to Sikh engagement with Pakistani Muslims and Pakistani Islam.

Given the esoteric nature of the theme and its grave import I will proceed with a profound sense of humility, fully conscious of limits of my understanding and inconsequentiality of my feeble voice.

THE PROBLEMS OF PEACE: THEN & NOW

Guru Nanak witnessed a lot of strife and discrimination suffered by the people and was very deeply troubled by their plight. In his group of compositions known as *babar bani* the hymns are outpourings of a soul touched by the horrible suffering inflicted on the hapless citizenry, men, women and children witnessed in the battles between the invading forces of Babar and the ruling Lodhi Afghans.

His canvas spans the larger social and historical perspective of pervasive moral decline, political corruption, injustice et al. The contributing factors may be variously identified as prevailing political chaos; corrupt state apparatus; oppressive and apathetic governance; pervasive inequities and inequality; cultural alienation; degradation in moral values and religious beliefs; alien dominance/oppression.

At the same time the ordinary citizen is seen to be apathetic to the state of affairs, almost blind in ignorance and dumb like effigies filled with straw.² The people's response seems to be guided, not by what they consider right but by the instinct to survive through a display of outward conformity with the dominant culture.³ They hypocritically cite from the ruler's scriptures and follow their life style in the public view while being rigidly traditional at home - behavior inherently indicative of a sense of insecurity for belonging to a different faith and culture.⁴

2. *andhi rayat gian vihooni bhaah bhare murdaar* - (M I p.469).

3. *neel vastra pehr hoveh parwaan* (M I p.472).

4. *antar pooja parhe katebaa sanjam turka bhai* -(M I p.471).

In this environment of fear and insecurity the Guru observed that the religious leadership did not inspire trust and that men of learning, engaged in petty squabbles, were actually interested in amassing worldly possessions and both *qazis* and *brahmins* spoke untruths and committed grievous hurts to people.⁵ Those, like *kashatriyas*, who were considered traditional protectors of the faith in the societal structure, had abjured their role.⁶ The functionaries of state were corrupt and would do anything for graft⁷ and the rulers had turned butchers forgetting their role and responsibilities towards their subjects.⁸

Nanak also poignantly describes unwelcome effects of and concern over alien influences on culture, language and the way of life.⁹ Such influences are seen to be discriminatory, extortionist, culturally pernicious and inhibiting cherished values and freedom of the subjected people.

In sum the Guru's commentary could be an eminently apt description for some of the problems we continue to face in the world today. In a world such as this what should a believer do? For a glimpse of Nanak's vision let us explore the matrix of Sikh thought in its various contexts as may bear on peace and harmony in the societal structure.

RESPECT FOR PLURALITY

Sikh thought considers all humans as children of the same Divine source and is respectful of dignity of all faiths and their sacred texts. The Sikh scripture, Sri Guru Granth Sahib is possibly the only sacred religious text that contains the compositions of the holy persons who believed in and practiced faithfully their own religious traditions. Guru Amar Das says that even though savants and sages may speak in response to

5. *moorakh pandit hikmat hujat sanjai kareh pyar* -[M I p.469], - *qadi kurh bol mal khaaye, brahman nhave jia ghave* -[M I p.662].

6. *khatriyan te dharam chhodiya* [M I p.663].

7. *qazi hoe rishvati vadi lai ke haq gavai* [Bhai Gurdas, Varan 1/30] .

8. *kal kate raaje kasaai dharam pankh kar udhriya* - (M I p.145).

9. Basant Hindol p.1191.

specific situations their teachings are the shared heritage of all mankind.¹⁰ Underpinning the same sentiment is referring to contents of the Granth as universally shared word of God revealed through the Gurus— *sarab sanjhi gurbani*. Thus beneath their strong sense of reverence for the Granth, Sikhs have a sentiment of humble acceptance that theirs is a revelation shared and to be shared with one and all.

Guru Arjan, who compiled the text of the Granth, says – you get a vision of God in the Vedas, Puranas and Simritees; you get it in the moon, sun and stars; the word of God who is eternally unwavering is addressed to one and all in mankind.¹¹ None is excluded from this divine blessing and none should be excluded. He also says that once the illusion is lifted off one's mind by the Guru's teaching, realization comes that Parbrahm and Allah are one and the same.¹² Bhagat Kabir intones us not to think of Ved, the Hindu texts, and Kateb, the Semitic texts, as untrue for falsehood lies in the inability of those who cannot ponder over and grasp the truths enshrined in them.¹³

Guru Nanak says in another place that if one were to really grasp the truth, one would recognize that with one Creator, unchanged over the ages, men have but one dharam.¹⁴ Gurū Ram Das says that treasure of devotion for God is infinite, overflowing and beyond measure and that devotees praise Him in countless ways – of all devotees sublime are those whose devotion is pleasing to God.¹⁵ The essence is divine acceptance of devotion however it may have been offered.

10. *parthai sakhi maha purkh bolde sanjhi sagal jahanai* – [M III, p.647].

11. *bed puraani simrit meh dekh saseear soor nakhyathr meh ek baanee prabh kee sabh ko bolai aap addol n kabehoo dolai* – [Gauri M V, p. 294].

12. *kaho nanak gur khoey bharam, eko alloh parbrahm* – [Ramkali M V, p. 897].

13. *bayd katayb kahau mat jhoothay jhoothaa jo na bichaarai* – [Parbhathi Kabir p.1350].

14. *eko dharma dir-rhai sach koey, gurnat poora jug jug soey* – [Basant M I, p. 1188].

15. *teri bhagat teri bhagat bhandar jibharai beant beanta — teri anik teri anik kareh har pooja ji — se bhagat se bhagat bhale jan nanak ji jo bhavah mere har bhagwanta* – [Asa M IV, So Purkh].

RELATING TO THE TEMPORAL

We all are a part of this temporal world pursuing our lives in various settings where we are placed. We have a level of individual autonomy but are intimately connected to and influenced by our families and the community where we live. Our lives are also impacted by the social and political dispensation surrounding and controlling our communities. All of us live, strive, draw sustenance from and wage all our struggles on this shared planet – the earth. There are thus a variety of interests and interfaces that bear upon our ability to live in peace and harmony. Let us look at the Guru's thought relating to some of these.

The Individual

Gurus have repeatedly stressed that birth, as a human is a great gift by God. This is the opportunity for an individual to be able to unite with the Creator. Men therefore must ponder over how they can spiritually advance themselves even as they live their lives in mundane pursuits as householders.

This world created by divine ordinance is intended by God to be a place where lives of men should be guided by virtuous deeds and moral action. A believer should live by his *dharma* and his endeavors should be earnest and altruistic. He must understand that he is responsible for his actions and not blame any body else for the choices he makes; for in the end recompense for good or bad that he does, he must receive himself.

In their social transactions, acceptance of differences in approach and working through them is recommended.¹⁶ Men should be gentle in their choice of words and avoid rancor for there is affinity between love and genteel dialogue. Courtesy and humility is commended not just for being more acceptable but because it is the essence of merit and virtue of a person.¹⁷

16. *raah dovain ik jaane soi sijhsi* [M I p. 142].

17. *mithat neevēen nanaka, gun changaiyan tat* [M I p.470].

A true devotee sees God's light in all and therefore judges not others. He instinctively cultivates an open fraternity where none is a stranger or inimical to one another. He also struggles against the vagaries of human mind in exercise of judgment.

The Gurus also unambiguously resolved some of the traditional conflicted thought about material acquisitions and economic activity vis-à-vis spiritual pursuit. The persuasion is that material possessions are pure and blessed if the means used to achieve them are fair; the owner is virtuous and their use includes altruistic purposes. Says the Guru - wealth, fineries, delicacies, rites, beliefs and deeds of the prayerful are blessed; homes, mansions, palaces of those are blessed where the needy and saintly are welcome to seek shelter; and horses and saddlery of those is blessed that the virtuous can avail.¹⁸

Violence is to be abjured. Those who love God are not vain and do not inflict violence on others. Guru commends, neither to be afraid nor to cause fear to any body. Sheik Farid suggests shunning revenge altogether almost in the manner of turning the other cheek and not causing pain to any one.¹⁹

Man must therefore endeavor to develop morally, ethically and spiritually and relate to his environment in a state of inner harmony, be a productive and constructive member of society contributing to amiable relations.

Family

Marriage is a sacred union blessed in the presence of the Guru. The couple jointly is enjoined to seek spiritual elevation

18. *tin ka khada paida maya sabh pavit heh jo nam har ratay, tin ke ghar mandir mahal sarai sabh pavit heh jini gurmukh sevak sikh abhiagat jaey varsatey, tin ke turey jeen khurgeer sabh pavit heh jini gurmukh sikh sadh sant chadh jaatey, tin ke karam dharam karaj sabh pavit heh jo bolehar har ram nam har satey, jin kai potey pun hai se gurmukh sikh guru peh jatey.* [Sorath ki Var M IV, p. 649/16].

19. *Farida je tu maaran mukiyan tina naa maare ghum, aapane ghar, jaaiye paer tina dey chum— Je tu priya di sik heeao na thhaey kahi daa –* [Slok Farid p.1384].

and both in this pursuit are akin to a woman longing for union with her true love – God. Each house is a *dharamsal* where God's praises are sung and poor and needy are welcome to share whatever they can offer. The family supports itself by honest and earnest endeavor and gives some for the common good.

Women are given a place of respect. On their status, the Guru questioned how could we speak ill of women who mothered all the upholders of our social order. Guru Amar Das encouraged women to shun wearing veils, to take leadership roles in the religious work and denounced the custom of *sati*. Even though family structure continues to be paternalistic, women are assured of their dignity. Their influence to promote calmness, moderation as well as inspiration to moral action and sacrifice is part of the Sikh lore. Men and women are enjoined to be steadfast in marital fidelity.

Children are brought up with love. Education and learning is encouraged. Moral values are imperative and inducing children to understand and imbibe Guru's teachings is part of parental role. The fraternal relations endure through life and there is no withdrawal into a phase of renunciation for personal spiritual edification. The path to liberation is through living a full, responsible life in prayerfulness. This way if grace of liberation comes to the individual it will also fall on those associated. Thus the family, so central to Sikh living is intended to provide a mutually supportive setting promoting moral, ethical and spiritual development of each member without impeding their temporal pursuits.

Community

A habitat or a community is the mini world in which a person grows up; sets up his own family; earns his living; relates to others; deals with those passing through and chooses those he keeps company with. This is a conglomerate of rich, poor; masters, servants; merchants, buyers; virtuous, sinners et al. This locale with its endowed nature's bounties is where he

learns to relate to natural phenomenon and diversity of various kinds – life forms, areas of knowledge, belief and value systems. This is also the place where some one may be in control – through birth, by force of his power or accomplished by other means. Gurus consider this community the crucible that moulds the person and offers him the choices that may determine his destiny.

Another related concept emphasized in Sikh thought is *sangat*. This may be explained as the collective where people engage in virtuous activities, prayer, altruism, singing God's praises. Its defining character is its focus and commitment to righteousness; open to all with none excluded. It is also in the midst of *sangat* that Guru-Sikh relationship played out in Guru's times. Those who came up to the measure of Guru's teachings, the Guru held them in very high esteem even pleading unto them to instruct him how to meet with the Lord.²⁰ Such deep mutuality continues to inspire the seekers and *sangat* is accorded the status of Guru manifest and one must seek it; lead others to it; support it; sustain it; expand it. At individual level it facilitates spiritual quest and promotes harmony.

Sikhs believe that the social order in this setting must promote equality. Men should look for the Divine light in others and not at their caste or persuasion for such distinctions do not exist in God's court. No institutionalized discrimination based on ethnicity, beliefs, class, caste, economic status, gender etc. is accepted. Being born into or growing into different stations in life is seen as gift of God. The guiding principle should be continuous effort for improvement with acceptance of what comes our way in humility without it impeding our endeavor for improvement. What is discriminatory, oppressive or unjust should be resisted – absent that one must have sagacity to accept life as it unfolds.

There is a vivid and poignant vision of an ideal community

20. *mere pran sakha gur ke sikh bhai mo ko karo updes har milai milaya* – [Gujri M IV, p.493].

named 'city sans grief' written by Bhagat Ravidas in the Granth.²¹ In this idyllic setting, society is supportive and people do not cause one another to suffer and all living in harmony are free to pursue happiness and spiritual elevation without any restraint. Ravidas was a *shudra* – well aware of the hurt and suffering caused by discrimination that *shudras* had to live and endure.

State/Ruling Elite

Leaders and those in leadership role are key at this level. Persons in positions of power must be held accountable. Their decisions must be made after deep deliberation and should be able to withstand moral scrutiny and tests for justice and being equitable. They must have clarity of vision and purpose for how can blind and ignorant lead the way.²² Their ability to control evil propensities is lauded. Their conduct must always be above reproach. A leader should be good natured, calm and sincere in his intent.

Justice is a basic pre-requisite of a civil society. To usurp or deny the rights of others is sinful for all. The State and the ruling elite also must be just and seen to be just. Bhai Kahan Singh in *Gurmatsudhakar* says that there is no worship like observance of justice. Giani Randhir Singh in *Premsumarag* says that 'before the Divine, the ruler would — be questioned — about the state of justice in his domain —.' Both commentaries argue that justice must be dispensed without favor and laws must apply equally to all.²³

People must have freedom of choice. The freedoms include freedom of faith, worship and cultural pursuits. Guru Tegh Bahadur accepted martyrdom to protect the right of worship for Hindus. Plurality is accepted and diversity is considered part of God's design for His creation.

Forgiveness has a place of importance in this matrix of human acts of omission and commission. The way one may

21. *be gam pura sehr ko nao* – [Gaūri Guareri, Ravidas ji ke Padey p. 345].

22. *Andhaa aagoo je theeyai kiyu paadhar jaanai* [p. 767].

23. Quoted in Avtar Singh, *Ethics of the Sikhs*, p.100 ff.

teach the child how not to repeat errant behavior while forgiving the past errors is considered divine and greatly lauded. God is the epitome of forgiveness and where forgiveness is, God is. This must be a guiding ethic at all levels – individual, family, community and state.

Decision Processes

Guru Nanak established the *sangat* at Kartarpur that provided a model for his successors. Guru Angad is credited with having established 131 *sangats*. In the time of Guru Amar Das he refined the structures to manage the expanding spread, then said to be as far apart as Kabul and Dacca by dividing them into 22 *manjis* [akin to Dioceses] and 52 *piris* under them. The management processes were altered and refined by successor Gurus as experience developed. Guru Gobind Singh gave a practical shape to a collective, consensual structure by formalizing the institution of *panj pyaras* or the five elect – persons chosen based on their demonstrated merits and commitment – to provide leadership. The device for consulting the Sikh general body named *sarbat khalsa* was another refinement added in the post Guru period. This model rooted in consultative principles and collective leadership continues to be espoused as the Sikh thought on Governance. I would hesitate to claim that Sikhs have succeeded in developing a clear conceptual frame and effective structures around the principle but would hazard to at least suggest that it well could have been the first such institutionalized approach among religious groups and having preceded the French Revolution by almost a century may have been a precursor of modern democratic models.

Harmony with the Creation

At an extended plane all the above activities are carried out in and as a part of the totality of our surrounding environment where for Nanak one single essence pervades the entire multiplicity of cosmic existence. God is immanent in His creation and this world is his home. The world that we see is in the

likeness of God and is His visible manifestation and is intended by God to be a place of beauty, an arena for virtuous deeds and moral actions and not a place of suffering or sin. God creates, sustains destroys and recreates all that is seen or unseen in the universe. This process is continuous and the creation expands or regresses as God wills. The entire universe is real, not illusory.

On the earth abide beings of myriad hues and infinite forms. Of all living beings God gave humans extra merits. Even as the other beings have their own place and purpose in God's scheme, they also fulfill purposes of humans. Yet humans are told that God is the one who bears the concern for all, is the curator of His creation, likes the way it is and looks at it joyfully and in abundant love.

All in the creation are subject to God's *hukam*. The balance and harmony in creation is founded in contentment, acceptance of divine order and a sense of respectful awe for the Supreme. Man can connect with God only while living in this world. This world and life therefore are important and one should bring the two in harmony to comprehend inter-connectedness between God and nature, attain inner peace and experience the ecstatic beauty and joy – *vismad, anand, ras, khera* – in divine dispensation.²⁴

JUXTAPOSING SPIRITUAL & TEMPORAL

In the Sikh thought spiritual pursuits and temporal living are not viewed separately and independent of one another. The two are reconciled in the concept variously referred by phrases as *miri piri, sant sipahi, degh tegh* – all implying that spiritual pursuits have to be accomplished even as one is engaged in the mundane responsibilities inherent in life as a householder with all its challenges, constraints and entanglements. A devotee therefore has to be a man of the world and man of God, a

24. *ibid* Chapter VI, Faith and Environment look at the Sikh perspective on environment and ecological issues.

saint and a soldier at the same time. That implies that it is not enough to understand and espouse the moral and ethical principles in a vacuum, one has to live by them in the real world and if needed be ready to defend what is righteous. Likewise acts of general benevolence have to be carried out while protecting good from evil and charity and valor have to come together to be effective instruments for societal peace and harmony.

For Sikhs therefore there is no shying away from righteous action — but to be determined to right the wrongs, fight to win.²⁵ Inaction or apathy is not commended when faced with tyranny, coercion, and exploitation or in pursuit of a righteous cause for one must tread the path of Lord's love only if one is prepared for the supreme sacrifice.²⁶

Sikh canon allows for recourse to use force if it is for just cause, pursuit of justice or in defense, not revenge – in all cases it should be last resort after other options have failed.²⁷ The Guru has also commented that if one beats up his equal, it might not be a cause for grievance — (but) if a tiger mauls herding cattle, the Master must answer.²⁸ Any such struggle should spare the innocent and their property.²⁹

WHERE DO WE START

I think the most eminent place for us to start would be within, to look inwards and see if we are doing enough to keep our relations harmonious with our inner self, those we deal with and the world around us. We should ponder if what we do

25. *de shiva bar mohey shubh karman te kabhoon neh taroon — nishchai he apni jeet karoon* - [Dasam Granth].

26. *jo to prem khelan kaa chaao sir dhar tali gali moree aao* [M I p.1412].

27. *chu kaar az hamah heelate darguzasht halaal, ast burdan b-shamsheer dast* -[Zafar Nama].

28. *je sakta sakte ko maare ta man raus na hoyi — sakta seeh mare pai vagai khasme saa pursai* [M I p.360].

29. For a comprehensive analysis of the Sikh paradigm in addressing societal ills and pursuit of justice see Nirmal Singh, Exploring Singh Spirituality, Chapter V, Sanbun, 2003.

or say or support is likely to promote the cause of peace and harmony in the society and the world at large bearing in mind that we should stay true to our beliefs and not compromise or be apathetic. Even a moment or two of introspection would bring home the problems and dilemmas inherent in this pursuit. The cause of peace and harmony surely verges on the sublime and needs a deep awakening of the spiritual within. It is a journey – not a destination.

Thus understood we can all begin with baby steps wherever we are. This very act of our conversation to day with all its limitations may still be one such step if it motivates some of us to become a bit more sensitive about what the Gurus are saying and try and relate it to the way we live and conduct ourselves. It is in that spirit that I want now to explore the potential and possibility of Sikh – Pakistani engagement.

THE TRIGGER: PAKISTAN-SIKH ENGAGEMENT DILEMMA

Let me now go back to the two weeks that I spent earlier in Pakistan during which our deliberations were focused on issues of peace and justice confronting the world in the context of complex and tragic events playing out in the Middle East. All our discussions except possibly at the Iqbal Academy focused on Islam and its relations with the Judeo Christian West under the shadow of post Sep. 11 tensions and conflicts. During these exchanges I tried to contribute what I could but I felt that my interventions based on Sikh thought and perspective possibly stayed at the margins of what the listeners took in. It drove home, if indeed needed, the importance in the prevailing geo-political context for primary focus of Muslim engagement, Pakistan included, being with the Western Judeo-Christian world.

I could also sense recognition of the priority to the need for Pakistan to engage with India at a secondary level, partly in tandem with and as an appendage to the primary driver. In addition to external pressures this also had its internal

imperatives in the recognition that continued hostility and low intensity conflict was getting nowhere and that stalemate was constraining their growth and development efforts.

This triggered within me some pondering to assess where, if at all, the Sikh thought, Sikh concerns and Sikh engagement with Islam could find some relevance outside of mere bonhomie of inter faith gatherings. Recognizably location of several Sikh holy sites and historical links did seem to make the case for Pakistan but since Sikhs did not have much clout or options to engage with Pakistan on their own, such a relationship at best could be at a tertiary level, rooted in relatively mundane motivations and achieved mainly through informal channels like people to people contacts, neighborhood trade and tourism, some cultural exchanges and initiatives launched by NGOs. Such an engagement will have the potential to promote harmony but will have move in consonance with and depend for its sustenance on the controlling drivers, essentially in its formative phases.

FACTORS AT PLAY

To get a sense of factors at play, I have tried to assemble impressions based not only on shared conversations with our hosts and those invited to participate in various discussions but also my exchanges with several students, laborers, coolies, waiters, security guards, pedestrians, shoppers, salesmen, bus drivers, passengers, villagers in their homes – men, women; young, old; poor and those better off. I also read a range of newspapers, magazines and books; took in the hoardings and shop signage's and various tell tale blurbs so characteristic of that part of the world.

Negatives

Some of my observations may be rather sobering but are relevant. Wandering Pakistani bazaars, tourist spots, parks and restaurants one may see many Arabs; some Westerners; crowds of locals but no Sikhs at all. There is no Sikh mention

or image on the TV. Sikh physical visibility in Pakistan therefore seemed relatively low even compared to many Western societies.

Sikh portrayal in history books and even expensive touristy publications is negative. Nor is the popular Sikh stereotype very helpful. I discerned a number of impressions implicit in our very polite conversation – unpredictable; confused about objectives; brave though fighting for what and who; caved in during 80's; quality of leadership and so on. Interest in and awareness about Sikhism and Sikhs did not seem to exist among the academia and intelligentsia. At another level, even the famous Lahore Museum that has had galleries dedicated to Hinduism, Jainism and Islam lacked a Sikh gallery all these years [a position now being rectified]. Sikh presence in Pakistani minds also seemed as blurred as their physical presence.

The reasons for this could be many. For one thing Pakistanis have no compelling need to think of Sikhs because as Muslims or as a State, Sikh interface is marginal to them. Next the negative effects of lingering historical memory, no doubt accentuated by the events of 1947 may still be at play even if with blunted intensity with passage of time. Then again Indian Punjab, and therefore Sikhs, have been insulated from Pakistan, more than other parts of India, over the last several decades because of the political situation and resultant restrictions on entry by foreigners, disruption in travel by road, rail or air and severely regulated and controlled cultural and pilgrim exchanges. The Punjabi spirit also was slow in resurfacing possibly because Punjabi identity was under severe strain on both sides and both the Punjabs had to address the problems of huge inflow of evacuees, adjust to their new demographics and emerging issues and equations in the polity of their respective states and countries.

Positives

Notwithstanding such reading of the contemporary situation I sensed some positives too, the strongest being a groundswell of warmth and goodwill we all experience during our visits

from man in the street. This is overwhelming, spontaneous and deeply touching. They also like the Sikh happy go lucky kind of buoyant spirit. There is empathy for Sikh struggle to resist assimilation and protect their identity. I have no doubt that elevation of Dr Manmohan Singh as the Indian Prime Minister would have played out well with the people in their perception of Sikhs.

The other positive is the obvious Sikh interest in this development. Guru Nanak was born in these parts and this is where he perfected the Sikh thought. History of Sikh Gurus is also indelibly linked to this geographic area. Sikh respect for this land is therefore rooted in their spiritual recesses and its unique place in their psyche will support any initiatives in this direction. A corollary to this is the potential of global Sikh tourism becoming a fairly significant business in Pakistan and if Indo-Pak peace moves lead to less restrictive visa regime it could open floodgate of Indian Sikh tourists.

My related premise also is that Indian Sikhs will always have to be neighbors, across the border, with a vibrant segment of Pakistani Muslims with their worldview and their own perception of the Sikhs. In the same strain, for Sikhs given their geo-political situation, Muslim world will mainly be Pakistan and Muslim opinion that may impact them the most would be Pakistani orientation. As such even though this recognition may not still be evident in Sikh thinking, this engagement should be in their long-term interest.

MOVING AHEAD

This is a sampling of temporal reality that should weigh into any endeavor as we try to move beyond bondages of the past. Events like high profile visits by political leaders on both sides, progressive easing of restrictions, conferences, cultural exchanges, trade fairs, sporting activities, Palki presentation, our effort at helping with relief work for the recent earthquake victims and the like are all helpful. I would however suggest a couple of things that I believe may help, even if indirectly.

I see Pakistani Sikhs caught up in a cycle of poverty and isolation and it also seems to me that reverential expectations of global Sikhs have added to their problems. For instance I observed at Nanakana Sahib two *akhand paths* in progress concurrently and was told that this goes on through the year due to requests from devotees' worldwide. This requires a lot of resource for offering ritual services; no doubt constraining possibility of local Sikhs realizing their potential and may also unwittingly revive ignoble practices associated with *mahants* who had to depend on Gurdwaras for their economic needs – a possibility surely better avoided.

I think that Pakistani Sikhs, to whom we are all beholden for taking care of our holy sites, should be helped to get education, go into professions or businesses and be competitive citizens of their country. This will also help mitigate some of the negatives noted earlier. If evidence be needed the recent reporting by the media of the first Sikh entrant into the exclusive Pakistani Army Officer cadre should convince any skeptics about the positive recognition that accomplishment brings to a community. Imagine again if Pakistani Sikhs with the help, guidance and even in a collaborative mode with global Sikhs were to set up businesses, add value to the country's economy and help generate employment. This may also bring some harmony increment in its wake if the Sikhs true to their Guru's teachings share any benefits with those less fortunate.

The need to provide continuity of service at our holy sites is the collective responsibility of the Sikhs every where and not entirely that of the few who either chose to stay back or were left behind during the mass exodus of 1947. Over the last several decades we have certainly made some contribution to these sites but looked at dispassionately self-serving nature of our missionary may become obvious. Apart from my earlier reference to major demand for *akhand paths*, we seem to have concentrated on development of the *serai* and related infrastructure for our comfort when visiting on festival occasions. Maintenance of these facilities is however an added

responsibility. To top it all an articulated expectation is regarding *maryada* to be followed or more precisely disapproval of the status quo and a continuing controversy about control of the institutions.

The need obviously is to look at the issue in its totality and see how the Sikh community in Pakistan can be helped in this major collective responsibility thrust on them by historical circumstances. We may have to think of replication of models used so well in Christian traditions where volunteers and youth including some doing their post college fieldwork, from countries across the globe assist in such effort altruistically or if needed with some financial assistance. Such steps would reduce pressures, help induce some fresh thinking and expand horizons of the local Sikhs and hopefully also help them to engage with the larger community with greater assurance and harmony. This may also help provide seva at the other historical Gurdwaras now being revived by PSGPC and global Sikhs without straining local Sikh resources.

While I am certain that any sentiment to help Pakistani Sikhs help improve their lot will receive wide support but I do wish to sound a word of caution here. When my article on Sikhs & Pakistan was published by Sikh Review in its Feb/Mar, 2005 issues, S Saran Singh, the editor, was so touched by my comments relating a couple of young kids I met at Panja Sahib that he straightaway made a public offer to provide them free education as resident scholars at Dakshai Public School in Simla Hills till they finished school. I was at the time going through a phase of indifferent health and could not visit Pakistan to bring it together but requested my friends at the Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad to help. It has not been easy and in spite of facilitation from IPS, my exploring and prodding through phone conversations with some concerned persons the offer remains unutilized for a multiplicity of reasons. Suffice it to note that such projects need careful planning and supporting canalizing and oversight agencies for any success.

We should also ensure open access to the Gurdwaras and

other sites managed by Sikhs in Pakistan. I noticed a group of schoolgirls visiting Nanakana Sahib to walk around the well-kept garden and the balustrade as well as to see the newly received golden palki at the Gurdwara. At Dera Sahib a group of well-dressed local Muslims asked my help to get in the Gurdwara since they had been refused entry by the security staff appointed by the Wakf Board. As I escorted them in I asked them where they had come from etc. They said they all were Tehsildars and their Departmental Promotion Committee was to meet soon and they were going to all holy sites around Lahore to seek divine blessing.

Whatever the reasons for their coming, refusing entry to non-Sikhs to Gurdwaras is against Sikh tradition and should not be made a rule. If it is a part of the State's preferred choice for security or other considerations, then it should be explained to those wanting to visit through clear notices exhibited at entrance to the site. Local Muslims certainly do not appreciate this restriction and I have seen and responded to protest mail on this issue from Pakistanis living abroad.

A suggestion that I had made to my friend Dr Suheyl Umar of Iqbal Academy was that recognizing the inclusive themes in Iqbal's writings they should consider bringing out the continuum of rich, humane, inspiring and spiritually enhancing thought emerging from Punjab over the last millennium - the long heritage including Sheikh Farid, Baba Nanak [and the Sikh Gurus], Bule Shah, Shah Hassan, Bhai Veer Singh, Allama Iqbal and so many others who grew up in this part of the world. My hope would be that several such initiatives would receive enthusiastic support and open up an avenue for collaborative work on an aspect of our shared heritage and contribute to empathetic understanding.

There is a growing expectation that opening of trade will help local businesses. Hopefully that will happen though business decisions are driven by competitive considerations and expectation of a windfall due to mere geographic or cultural affinity may turn out to be delusional. Any business activity

including tourism if not properly handled may end up creating only low return ventures and low paying jobs for the locals with real economic benefit going to the distant, unknown entrepreneurs. With this constraint noted, growth in trade would no doubt bring benefit and also help promote interaction and exchange.

The question may be asked whether there is a degree of relevance to all this to our subject. I believe there is because any thing done to mitigate years of neglect that may have caused continued alienation and silent suffering would be a step towards improving human condition and should be conducive to bring increment to societal peace and harmony. It is possible that some of what I am saying may sound like charity at home - *andha baantey sheerni phir phir apnai ko de* - and might not get past rigor of the highest ideals of *seva* but I hope that it still receives divine, and your, acceptance even if at the next lower level!

DIVERSITY OR CONFORMITY

INTERNAL SIKH TENSIONS

THE CONTEXT

Over time Sikhs sense that a sort of hierarchy has developed among them where the laity is stratified based on their rigor in certain observances. This stratification is rooted in the thought that order of Khalsa is the supreme form of an observant Sikh - following Guru Gobind Singh's edict on Baisakhi of 1699; with Khalsa form being interpreted as the image of a Sikh with unshorn hair and other associated observances commonly referred to as five K's. The broad layering seems to be viewed in the order -

- Amritdharis - those who have partaken of and are observant of ritual initiation known as amrit and sport 5K's
- Sabat soorat kesdharis - those faithfully sporting unshorn hair and related Sikh observances but are not amritdharis and may not sport kirpan
- Kesdharis - sport hair and related observances though not rigorously
- Monas¹ - those who have shed their hair and related observances or their progeny who continue with the same practice

1. I prefer the use of the term 'mona' - those who have shed their hair - to the word 'sirgum' that has been used for them in the Punjabi version of Sikh rehat Maryada. The term 'mona' is widely used for this category in lay discourse though some also use the term 'patit', translated as 'fallen'. I have later argued that the latter is not appropriate for this group per my reading of the SRM.

- Sehjdharis – those belonging to families who believe in Sikhi and have been practicing Sikhs but have not historically sported unshorn hair and related 5k observances.

There also are those who may be as close to Sikhi as to some form of other practices and beliefs, mostly Hindu but they are not the subject of our discussion because they do not claim to be Sikhs nor are they emotionally linked to the Sikh institutions or community life. Sects that have been excommunicated over time for non-observance also do not form part of our discussion.

Within the above broad stratification, several amritdharis assert that amrit initiation is obligatory to be called a Sikh and give an impression of thinking themselves as better Sikhs. Those who are kesdharis do not see amrit to be a compelling need but would want Sikhs not to cut their hair. Monas feel that notwithstanding their choice to not keep unshorn hair they are good Sikhs and do not like to be treated otherwise. Sehjdharis have mostly given up on hitching on to Sikhs and have been drifting into several fringe sects or blending back into the Hindu pantheon.

Overlapping this stratification is the feeling of relative superiority that Punjabi Sikhs may feel relative to their Bihari, Ouriya, Dakhani or their White [Gora] Sikh brethren. Within Punjabis runs also the caste hierarchy in another parallel set of layers where Khatris and Jats have been jostling for the top level unmindful of their attitude towards Mazhbi Sikhs, Sikligars and others who belong to the traditionally lower placed castes.

Significantly all these layers come together in the Gurdwara setting and even though in their relation to the Guru their devotion and intensity of belief may be equally strong one would discern divide along all interfaces for various reasons including an undercurrent of resentment and hostility that is hurting and dividing the community and making it weaker instead of stronger as was intended and realized in earlier times.

To understand the implications of the problem that we are about to discuss it would be helpful to briefly explain some of the core concepts that reflect on our subject and to recapitulate some of the developments that have taken place over time and influenced Sikh thinking and attitudes. We will limit ourselves for the purposes of this discussion to the visible Sikh identity associated primarily with amrit and sporting unshorn hair and the way it is impacting their communal life. Several words in traditional parlance have been used in the text. Those reflecting on the theme have been explained or translated for ease of understanding. Glossary of terms at the end should also be helpful.

A SIKH: IN GURU'S WORDS

Guru Nanak says that he alone may be called Guru, a Sikh and a physician, who knows the patient's illness. He is not affected by actions, responsibilities and entanglements and remains detached amidst household attachments. He renounces lust, anger, ego, greed, attachment and maya. Deep within, he meditates on the reality of the Imperishable one and by Guru's grace reaches Him.² He meditates on Naam, burns away his attachment to maya by the Guru's shabad and restrains and controls his wandering mind. Only through grace is obtained the company of such a Sikh.³

Guru Amardas put it simply that he alone is a Sikh, a friend, a relative and a sibling, who walks in the way of the Guru's will.⁴

Guru Ramdas said that one who calls himself a Sikh of the true Guru should rise early and meditate on the Lord's Name.

2. *so guroo so sikh kathheelaee so vaidh j jaanai rogee this kaaran ka(n)m n dhha(n)dhhaa naahee dhha(n)dhhai girehee jogee kaam krodh aha(n)kaar thajeealae lobh mohu this maaeiaa man thath avigath dhhaaeiaa gur parasaadhee paaeiaa* – Gauri M I, p. 503.

3. *Maya moh gur sabad jalaey nirmal nam sadh hirdai dhiaey dhavat rakhai thaak rahaey sikh sangat karam milaa-ay* – Asa M I, p. 412.

4. *so sikh sakhaa bandhap hai bhaa-ee je gur kay bhaanay vich aavai* – M III, P. 601.

— Gursikh who meditates on Har, Har, with every breath and every morsel of food becomes pleasing to the Guru — That person, unto whom my Lord and Master is kind and compassionate - upon that Gursikh, the Guru's teachings are bestowed. Servant Nanak begs for the dust of the feet of that Gursikh, who chants the Naam, and inspires others to chant it.⁵

Says Guru Arjan that the true Guru cherishes his Sikh, washes away any filth of evil in his intellect, and frees him of his bonds. The Sikh of the Guru abstains from evil deeds. The true Guru gives his Sikh the wealth of Naam. The Sikh of the Guru is very fortunate for the true Guru helps his life and hereafter stay organized. O Nanak, with the fullness of his heart, the true Guru mends his Sikh.⁶

Guru Gobind Singh says 'the true Sikh remembers the ever-awakened Light and does not bring anyone else in the mind; he practices his vow with wholehearted affection and not even by oversight believes in graves and monuments.'⁷ Another shabad often quoted says 'such a man, in whose heart shines the full Divinely radiant light is a true a pure Khalsa. He the Khalsa meditates on the ever-radiant Light, day and night, and rejects all else but the one Lord from. He decorates himself with perfect love and faith, and believes not in fasts, tombs, crematoriums and hermit cells, even by mistake. He knows none except the one Lord in the performance of acts of

5. *gur satgur kaa jo sikh akhaa-ay so bhalkay uth har naam Dhi-aavai. — jo saas giraas Dhi-aa-ay mayraa har har so gursikh guroo man bhaavai — jis no da-i-aal hovai mayraa su-aamee tis gursikh guroo updays sunaavai. jan naanak Dhoorh mangai tis gursikh kee jo aap japai avrah naam japaavai* — M IV, p. 305-6.

6. *satgur sikh kee karai partipaal. sikh kee gur durmat mal hirai. satgur sikh kay banDhan kaatai.gur kaa sikh bikaar tay haatai. satgur sikh ka-o naam Dhan day-ay. gur kaa sikh vadbhaagee hay. satgur sikh kaa halat palat savaarai. naanak satgur sikh ka-o jee-a naal samaarai* — Gauri Sukhmani M V, p. 286.

7. *Jaagat jot japa: nis baasur ek binaa man naik na aanai Pooran prem prateet sajai brat gor maimat bhool na—* 33 Swayya, Dasam Granth, p. 1350.

pilgrimage, charities, compassion, austerities and self-control.⁸ In another shabad he says that Khalsa are Akal Purakh's army, manifested per His will. So long the Khalsa retain their distinctiveness I will extend all my strength and support to them but if they lose their way I will no more extend them that esteem.⁹

Another definition from the Rahitnama attributed to Bhai Dya Singh says, "A Sikh is known by his faith in the divine Word. The living code, Rahit, that he inwardly observes should proclaim his identity. Let him drink the amrit of the Divine name and put on the vestment of restraint. Never abandon the Rahit."¹⁰

The way the Gurus saw their Sikhs is rooted in guru-disciple relationship and focusses on their core as spiritual beings. The depiction of Sikhs by the Gurus as well as description in the Rahitnama ascribed to Daya Singh is focused on interiority of the Sikh character. In our contemporary context using these descriptions as definitions is bound to present a lot of difficulties for the reason that even though what is said may sum up the essence of being a Sikh it does not seem to relate to Khande ka Pahul – the Sikh initiation ceremony – and external symbols including *kes* – unshorn hair – that have come to be associated with Sikh identity over the centuries. Additionally while it makes sense to define a faith by its precepts, it is not possible to use observance of precepts to define its followers due to difficulties in such an intrusive and likely contentious verification.

8. *pooran joth jagai ghatt mai thab khalas thahi nakhalas janai jagith joth japai nis basur eak bina man naik n anai pooran praem pratheeth sajai brath gor marrhee matt bhool n manai theerathh dhan dhaya thap sanjam eak bina nehi eak pashhanai* - Amrit Keertan, Page 291.

9. *khhalasa akal purakh kee aj pragattiou khhalasa pramatham kee maj jab lag khhalasa rehae niara thab lag thaej keeo main sara jab eih gehai biparan kee reeth main n karon ein kee pratheeth* – Amrit Kirtan, p. 291.

10. As quoted and translated by W.H. McLeod, in *Sikhs of the Khalsa*, p. 125, 2003, Oxford University Press.

AMRIT IN GURBANI

Literally amrit means immortal or that which is not subject to death and refers to the age-old concept of the human search for a potion that assures immortality. Guru Nanak put it very simply that amrit in Sikh thought is 'God's word'¹¹ - a description that is direct and clearly leads one to identify amrit with Gurbani. Guru Amar Das endorses the same view saying that amrit is the name of the True one - it cannot be described beyond that.¹² Guru Angad makes a categorical statement that puts any other interpretation at rest saying that 'those blessed with the glorious greatness of Your name are imbued with Your love. O Nanak, there is [this] only amrit and none other at all. This nectar is obtained within the mind through Guru's grace by those so pre destined.'¹³

Thus the divine Guru is the sacred shrine of pilgrimage, and the pool of divine nectar; bathing in the Guru's wisdom, one experiences the Infinite.¹⁴ This is the ultimate goal of a Sikh. Imbibing amrit brings peace within and leads the devotee to His court in robes of honor.¹⁵ This is merger with the Divine - the concept of state of immortality in the Guru's thought.

PATIT IN GURBANI

In Gurbani the word 'patit' has been translated as sinner. It is a generic description and if viewed with a sense of humility could apply to each one of us because we all are not above sin in our lives. Guru Nanak says for himself 'I am a wicked sinner and a great hypocrite; You are the Immaculate and Formless Lord.'¹⁶

11. *amrit teree baaneeaa* - Srirag M I, p. 72.

12. *amrit sachā nam hai kehānaa kashhoo n jāae* - Srirag M III, p. 33.

13. *Jin vadiāi tērē nām kī tē rahē man māhi. Nānak amrit ēk hai dūjā amrit nāhi. Nānak amrit manai māhi pāiai gur parsād. fin%ī pīū rang sio jin% ko likhiā ād* - Slok M II, p. 1238.

14. *gurdev teerath amrit sarovar gur gīaan majan aparānparāa* - Gauri MV, p. 262.

15. *pee amrit santokhiā daragehi paidhāa jāae* - Srirag M I, p. 62.

16. *ho paapee pathith param paakhanddee thoo niramal nirankaaree* - Sorath M I, p. 596.

The Gurus have suggested several scenarios that could help absolve sins or a sinner could be saved. Inherently all these envisage recognition of own fallibility and inner urge and effort to change by living per the Guru's precepts, company of the virtuous and singing praises of the Divine as the following verses would explain:

- I was a great sinner, but I have been made pure, singing the Lord's Glorious Praises.¹⁷
- I was a sinner, and I have been sanctified, taking to the Guru's feet.¹⁸
- Joining the saadh sangat, company of the virtuous, and meditating on the divine sinners become pure.¹⁹
- Just as iron slag is transmuted into gold if touched by philosopher's stone, joining the sangat purifies the sinner through the Guru's teachings.²⁰
- Even sinful people conquer the realm of death, if they become the God's humble servants, and are imbued with the Guru's spiritual wisdom.²¹

KES IN GURBANI

In Gurbani hair is often seen as wondrous and beautiful, associated with the divine. This association is at two levels. Firstly God is also known as Kesav – the One with the hair. Next singing His praises Nanak specifically points to a vision of long hair when he says - Your eyes are so beautiful, and Your teeth are delightful. Your nose is so graceful, and Your hair is so long. Your body is so precious, cast in gold.²²

17. *meha pathith thae hoth puneetha har keerathan gun gavo* – Todi M V, p. 73.

18. *pathith pavith lag gur kae pairae jeeo* – Majh M V, p. 216.

19. *kar saadhhasangath simar maadhho hohi pathith puneeth* – Sorath M IX, p. 631.

20. *jio chhuhi paaras manoor bhae kanchan tio patit jan mil sangatee sudh hovat guramatee sudh haadho.* – Kanra M IV, p. 1297.

21. *jeethehi jam lok pathith jae praanee har jan siv gur gyaan rathae* - Sava-yay (praise of Guru Ram Das: Ga-yand) p. 1401.

22. *tayray bankay lo-in dant reesalaa. sohnay nak jin lammrhay vaalaa. kanchan kaa-i-aa su-inay. kee dhaalaa* - M I p. 567.

I have looked everywhere in every country, but nothing equals even a hair of my Beloved.²³

In their deep reverence and devotion for the Divine the Gurus often talk of serving God and the godly in various ways with their hair. Guru Nanak says - with my hair, I wash the feet of Your slave; this is my life's purpose²⁴ and - with my hair, I dust the feet of the Guru.²⁵

Hair were expected to be kept clean for both men and women. Clean, well kept hair were a sign of good upbringing. Guru Nanak deprecates the yogi practice of uncut matted and disheveled hair as hideous and dishonor to family and ancestry.²⁶

Ritual shaving of hair or their wearing in braids or matted form is no sign of devotion. Guru Nanak says 'Some shave their heads, some keep their hair in matted tangles; some keep it in braids, while some keep silent, filled with egotistical pride Their minds waver and wander in ten directions, without loving devotion and enlightenment of the soul. They abandon the Ambrosial Nectar, and drink the deadly poison, driven mad by maya. Past actions cannot be erased; without understanding the hukam they become beasts.'²⁷

Truth is not found by shaving one's head. The Guru says that one cannot connect with the truth by enduring suffering, life of comfort, wandering like fish in water or foreign lands, studying scriptures or shaving one's head.²⁸ Only loving adoration of God helps. About ritualistic shaving of head to atone for misdeeds, witness - One does what the mind pleases.

23. *paekh aaeiou sarab thhaan dhaes pria rom n samasar laagai* - Sarang M V, p. 1209.

24. *kays sang daas pag jhaara-o ihai manorath mor* - M I, p. 500, 2.

25. *gur kay charan kays sang jhaaray* - M I, p. 387.

26. *ik jataa bikat bikraal kul ghar khovhee* - M I, p. 1284.

27. *moond mudaa-ay jataa sikh baadhee mon rahai abhimaanaa manoo-aa dolai dah dis dhaavai bin rat aatam gi-aanaa amrit chhod mahaa bikh peevai maa-i-aa kaa dayvaanaa. kirat na mit-ee hukam na boojhai pasoo-aa maahi samaanaa* - Maroo M I, p. 1013.

28. *naa sat dukhee-aa naa sat sukhee-aa naa sat paanee jaant fireh. naa sat moond mudaa-ee kaysee naa sat parhi-aa days fireh* - Ramkali M I, p. 952.

Kabeer why do you shave your head if you do not tame your mind? It is useless and will not help.²⁹

'And don't miss the turban - how handsome is your turban! And how sweet is your speech. What are Mughals doing in the city of Dwarika? My sovereign Lord dark-skinned Krishna, You alone are Lord of so many thousands of worlds.³⁰

Gurus mention 'nais' - barbers - as part of the society and are praises for Sain who was a barber and attained merger with the Divine. Implicitly there is nothing morally, ethically or spiritually constraining in being a barber nor is there any suggested condemnation or implied lack of ability to connect with the divine of those who use barbers.

Gurbani cites using hair to reverentially fan or to sweep the feet of the righteous; every hair of those in prayer is deemed to be in tune with the divine and singing His praises; the approaching messenger of death grabs a sinner by hair. The use of metaphor suggests the practice of long hair among people.

The Gurus are unequivocal in decrying those ritualistically wearing matted hair, or those who ritualistically shave their heads or pluck their hair out - the message for them is that without internal transformation all such travails are of no avail. As against matted or unclean hair shaved heads are commended. There is no suggestion that those serving as barbers are engaged in an activity that may be in conflict with the divine dispensation.

With such contexts dominating the discourse surrounding hair in the Granth, it seems safe to conclude that hair are associated with the divine, recognized as personal adornment but the act of wearing hair is not ascribed any spiritual merit or prescribed for Sikhs. There is nothing in Gurbani that can be construed as derogatory or mocking of hair nor does one

29. *kabeer man moondi-aa nahee kays mundaa-ay kaan-ay jo kichh kee-aa so man kee-aa moondāa moond ajaan-ay* - Slok Kabir p. 1369, 101.

30. *khoob thaeree pagaree meethae thaerae bol davaarikaa nagree kaahay kay magol chandee hazaar aalam aykal khaanaa. ham chinee paatisaah saavlay barnaa* - Tilang Nam Dev, p. 727.

find any evidence that Gurus commend keeping of hair as a ritual observance. Writings of the tenth Guru, Bhai Gurdas or Bhai Nandlal do not present any view contrary to this understanding.

AMRIT & KES IN HISTORY

Amrit also has been associated with the process of initiation of a novice into the faith. It was a ritual potion administered to the devotee when the Guru accepted him/her into the order. It was intended as a seal of mutual acceptance of the spiritual relationship between the devotee and the Guru and a tacit agreement on the part of the devotee that living by guru's teachings was his chosen path.

Tradition has it that in earlier stages this ritual initiation was done by the person of the Guru only through administering a few drops of water touched by the Guru's toes to the novice. This ceremony referred to as *charanamrit* was later also permitted to be carried out by Masands who were spiritual leaders appointed by the Gurus in regions far and wide. There is no evidence to suggest that this ceremony was considered necessary as a right of passage for those born into the faith.³¹

It is said that martyrdom of two Gurus and continued attacks on Sikhs led Guru Gobind Singh to conclude that it was a need of the time for Sikhs to have a visible identity so that as a breed of saint soldiers spiritually inspired by their vows, they will feel compelled to stand steadfast in defence of righteousness because of expectations associated with their visible identity. This led to the Guru introducing the ceremony of *khande ka pahul*, or the initiation ceremony now popularly known as *amrit dharan* on the Baisakhi day in 1699.

The first five initiates were selected through a process akin to putting them through fire. In other words they had to be seen as men of great devotion, fortitude and sacrifice to be the first ones to be so blessed. They in turn administered the

31. For a detailed treatment and analysis see Tirlochan Singh, *The Turban and the Sword of the Sikhs*, Amritsar, 2001.

pahul to the Guru. This was in fact the way the process was demonstrated by the Guru to proceed when living Guru in person was not there – that is that an elect five with demonstrably impeccable credentials could initiate those considered ready for induction into the Khalsa order. It is believed that the Guru ordained that Sikhs must sport 5k's as a part of this initiation.

This ceremony is said to have substituted the earlier charanamrit ceremony and differed from it in some important ways. Firstly the nectar was prepared while gurbani was recited and then the initiate was administered the nectar by five Sikh elects who represented the Guru. In this manner the nectar was seen blessed by Guru's word and Guru's presence in physical, human form was provided by the presence of Guru Granth Sahib and the elect five acting on behalf of the Guru. The next important difference was that this initiated the person into the order of the Khalsa with its specific vows and code of discipline.

Though the new initiation rite was obviously strongly commended by Guru Gobind Singh there is no conclusive evidence that the Guru asked all Sikhs to renew their initiation through this ritual.³² Nor is there any suggestion that this ritual was made a right of passage for those born to Sikh families or the novices entering the faith. It seems to have been intended to become the standard procedure for a formalized initiation of those who had reached a level where as individuals they felt that they had imbibed the basic tenets

32. Teja Singh & Ganda Singh [Patiala, 2006] say that 'He also ordered that all those who called themselves Sikhs should get themselves confirmed by receiving the new baptism.' [p.68] Khushwant Singh has quoted Teja Singh & Ganda Singh but his account does not include this assertion. [Vol. I, 2004] Gopal Singh is also quiet on the subject. [2002] Sangat Singh has quoted Gopal Singh and made no comment on this issue. [1999] Harbans Singh also has said nothing. [Manohar, 1999] J S Grewal has said that khalsa were the true Sikhs but adds that sehjdharis were considered part of khalsa in 18th century – see note 34.

of Sikhi and were willing and prepared to abide by the discipline of the Khalsa order.

In history the Khalsa carved a new path. In the immediate post-Guru period [18th century] they fought oppression and discrimination against very heavy odds. There is strong historical evidence that Khalsa bands took to the hills to avoid repression and to continue their resistance using guerrilla tactics. Sikhs with hair were literally hunted when ruling Mughals and Afghan invaders placed reward on their heads. Thus Khalsa continued to be rigorously tested and were never found to give up on their faith. On the other hand in the midst of such unfavorable circumstances the Khalsa numbers swelled and their principled conduct earned grudging respect of their foes for never molesting women, hurting the weak and the unarmed or ravaging property of the populace. Kes thus gained currency as an unerring symbol of the ethical in Sikh identity.

During the Sikh rule and later with the coming of the British the physical threat to Sikhs receded. However under the British, Punjab soon was in the throes of three-way struggle among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs for protecting their respective interests. The physical symbols of Sikh identity now became the principal way to define their separateness from Hindus who under the Arya Samaj movement were attempting to assimilate Sikhs into the Hindu fold. Sikhs enthusiastically supported the initiatives launched by Singh Sabha activists and the number of kesdharis continued to go up especially among the urban educated and business communities. The British also indirectly promoted the amritdhari Sikh identity by making it a pre requisite for recruitment into prestigious Sikh Regiments. This continued to draw rural Sikhs into amritdhari fold who on return from their tenure of duty invariably continued to observe their vows and even encouraged others to follow the tradition. There was one change that crept in now – the initiation increasingly came to be used to proclaim identity and for conversions. By late 19th century Khalsa and kesdhari numbers were on the rise. Sikhs felt

relatively secure with this identity and continued to develop, grow and stay buoyant.

The next phase of change came when after the end of First World War Sikhs launched a movement for getting the control of historical Sikh shrines from hereditary priests. This struggle, led and supported by kesdhari Sikhs stayed totally non-violent in spite of brutal force used to curb it. This earned widespread respect and eventually led to the transfer of management of Gurdwaras to a Sikh body under 1925 Government of India Act. This act defined who is a Sikh to determine the electors, prescribed who could hold office under the act and also laid down procedure for election of the managing body. With amritdharis qualified to hold office the control of Sikh Gurdwaras passed into their hands exclusively. On the religious front the changes were generally positive. The Gurdwara managements looked more orderly and the liturgical services were cleansed of distortions introduced in earlier days. By 1945 under the aegis of SGPC, the apex Gurdwara management body, a consensus was reached to promulgate Sikh Rehat Maryada [SRM], Sikh code of conduct that also defined who is a Sikh. Later in 1971 an Act passed to create the managing body for Delhi historical Gurdwaras carried another definition of a Sikh. All the three definitions are germane to our subject and we will go into that discussion as we proceed.

A surmise that seems credible is that in history amrit and kes have been linked to identity of Sikhs as important markers. Repeated attempts at bringing clarity to definition of a Sikh during the 25 years preceding and following the division of India suggest that Sikh activism was strongly guided by their perception that:

- Kes and amrit were critical observances relating to Sikh identity,
- Purity of Sikh transmission was possible if their religious institutions promoted a uniform code of conduct and maryada for all Sikhs to follow and
- Control of Sikh religious institutions in the hands of

those with defined identity was central to survival and growth of Sikhi and Sikh political pursuits.

On the political front however the things did not go well. The real test of leadership came when the British decided to leave and the Akalis could not negotiate any arrangement that could have secured Sikh interests in the successor regimes. In retrospect it would appear that their failure was due not only to a lack of vision but also their inability to negotiate with or relate to the urbane and saavy British ruling elite and other political leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah. During the partition of the country Sikhs became the biggest losers. They lost their holy sites. Their loss of valuable agricultural land was massive and being easily identifiable their loss of life in the riots was also heavy. The displaced Sikh population resettled wherever they could find shelter and opportunity. The migration of population did increase Sikh concentration in some parts of Punjab that led to demand for a Sikh majority state. Politics soon started to look like a profitable occupation and the Sikh leaders showed propensity to become easy prey to tempting emerging opportunities. This was the beginning of contemporary phase of Sikh story viewed by many as one of their serious decline from the Sikhs of yore.

SIKH: DEFINITIONS IN LAW & SIKH REHAT MARYADA [SRM]

Sikhs had long felt that in the emerging environment in the later part of 19th century they had to define their religious boundaries with a greater degree of clarity. This need became a necessity when in early 1920's after a successful campaign for Gurdwara reform, the Government had to introduce legislation to provide legal framework for implementation of the accord with Akalis. This gave rise to Sikh Gurdwaras Act 1925 that had to contain a definition of who is a Sikh.

Subsequently in 1971 Delhi Sikh Gurdwaras Act was promulgated. This act also gave a definition of a Sikh. During

formulation of these acts there were consultations with Sikh leadership and several detailed accounts of these deliberations are available. The list of voters was determined by how a Sikh was defined and the office holders by the relevant eligibility criteria.

SIKH GURDWARAS ACT 1925

The definition of a Sikh per the act is:

- "Sikh" means a person who professes the Sikh religion or, in the case of a deceased person, who professed the Sikh religion or was known to be a Sikh during his lifetime. If any question arises as to whether any living person is or is not a Sikh, he shall be deemed respectively to be or not to be a Sikh according as he makes or refuses to make in such manner as the [Provincial Government], may prescribe the following declaration: I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh, that I believe in the Guru Granth Sahib, that I believe in the Ten Gurus and that I have no other religion. (9)
- "Amritdhari" Sikh means and includes every person who has taken khande-ka-amrit or khanda pahul prepared and administered according to the tenets of Sikh religion and rites, at the hands of five pyaras or 'beloved ones'. (10)
- "Patit" means a person who being a kesdhari Sikh trims or shaves his beard or kes or who after taking amrit commits any one or more of the transgressions. (11)

DELHI SIKH GURDWARAS ACT 1971

The act defined;

- "Sikh" as a person who professes the Sikh religion, believes and follows the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the ten Gurus only and keeps unshorn hair (Kes). If any question arises as to whether any living person is or is not a Sikh, he shall be deemed respectively to be or not to be a Sikh according as he makes or

refuses to make in the manner prescribed by rules the following declaration: - "I solemnly affirm that I am a Kesdhari Sikh, that I believe in and follow the teachings of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the ten Gurus only, and that I have no other religion."

- "Amritdhari Sikh" means and includes every Sikh who has taken Khande ka Amrit or Khanda Pahul, prepared and administered according to the tenets of Sikh religion and rites at the hands of five Pyaras or "beloved ones".
- "Patit" means a Sikh who trims or shaves his beard or hair (kes) or who after taking Amrit commits any one or more of the four Kurahits.

The definitions in both the acts suggest that Sikhs are not monolithic but have certain range of internal diversity. A closer examination also would show that progressively the stress on *kes* was amplified and being an observant kesdhari was made a requirement of a Sikh in the Delhi Gurdwaras Act. With the 1925 Act amended in October 2003 both the acts as presently in force extend voting rights to kesdharis and allow only amritdharis to seek to be elected to hold any office under the acts.

SIKH REHAT MARYADA 1945

The Sikh Rehat Maryada [SRM] approved in 1945 defines a Sikh as 'any human being who faithfully believes in:

- i. One Immortal Being,
 - ii. Ten Gurus, from Guru Nanak Sahib to Guru Gobind Singh Sahib,
 - iii. The Guru Granth Sahib,
 - iv. The utterances and teachings of the ten Gurus and
 - v. The baptism bequeathed by the tenth Guru, and who does not owe allegiance to any other religion, is a Sikh.'
- [Chapter 1 *Article 1* SRM].

In our discussion that follows we will be looking at a

variety of provisions in the SRM and the two Acts that reflect on our subject. Readers will find reference to full text of the SRM helpful for greater appreciation of issues. The text, both original in Punjabi and its English version, can be accessed at the website of the SGPC.

SRM & ACTS – SOME DISCUSSION

Definition of a Sikh

The SRM historically was promulgated in the middle of the period between the two acts [1945 - almost mid way between 25 & 71]. The elect group that drafted the SRM knew of the definition in the 1925 act but they chose to define a Sikh in a generic manner based on belief criterion, seemingly cognizant of existing internal Sikh diversity. It also seems that the faithful belief criteria of the SRM are intended to be a non-intrusive verification equivalent of affirmation in 1925 act or professing to be a Sikh of 1971 act.

The SRM having thus defined a Sikh starts using two labels – Sikhs and amritdhari Sikhs or the Khalsa in a manner that clearly sets them apart. One can only infer from this that the appellation Sikh in SRM covers amritdhari Sikhs and non-amritdhari Sikhs including kesdharis, sirgunm [a term used in the SRM for those who having been kesdharis chose to cut their hair], patits and those who may be sehjdharis [term not specifically mentioned in the SRM]. Unbaptised Sikhs are called *be-amritye* [Article XXIV, q, 2]. Patit Sikhs are translated as fallen Sikhs [Article V q, Article XXIV q 2].

The SRM specifies observance of 5 k's for amritdhari Sikhs alone [Article XXIV]. For [plain] Sikhs the only reference to kes says that they shall not dishonor the kes of their children [Article XVI, i]. In other words children born to Sikh families must not suffer their hair being dishonored as a result of decision by the parents. The decision to keep or not to keep unshorn hair must be the individual's with remedies for those who decide not to follow the tradition.

Patit

In both the Acts patit is defined as a person who being a kesdhari Sikh trims or shaves his beard or kes or who after taking amrit commits any one or more of the transgressions. In the SRM, unlike the two laws, the term has not been extended to include kesdhari Sikhs who dishonor their hair. For such Sikhs the SRM has used term 'sirgunm' in its Punjabi version explaining sirgunm as a Sikh who was kesdhari but has cut his hair [*kesdhari ho kai jo kes kataa devai* – p. 27, note *]. Patit Sikhs translated as fallen Sikhs suffer certain restrictions including that an ardas on their behalf cannot be offered at the takhats.

Amritdharis – Privileges & Responsibilities

The following privileges are limited to amritdharis alone per the SRM:

- Only amritdhari Sikhs can enter the sacred spaces in the takhats [Article V, q] thus restricting liturgical functions like granthi, ardassia, ragi, kathakar, sevadar etc at these most sacred shrines to them.
- The collective of amritdhari Sikhs only constitutes Guru Panth. The manner of its working have not been spelt out.
- Appeals against local decisions are to be made to Akal Takhat. Akal Takhat also has a tradition of deliberative decisions jointly by heads of the five takhats - all amritdharis.
- Gurmatta to introduce major directional changes can be approved only by Guru Panth representatives [please see the Punjabi version of SRM – the English translation is erroneous]

In addition to Gurmat Rehni, Article XVI amritdharis also are expected to live to a more stringent code as per Article XXIV. The requirement to sport 5 k's is not listed in Article XVI that is applicable to all Sikhs but is prescribed in Article XXIV [section p, relating to 5 k's] for amritdharis. It also

seems that the code is harsher for amritdharis e.g. for failure to follow Sikh discipline [plain] Sikhs can seek pardon as prescribed in Article XXV and punishment intended is light like manual service as against amritdharis facing automatic boycott for the same default under Article XXIV q 7. Amritdharis also have to go through reinitiation if they dishonor the hair under Article XXIV [section p, four transgressions].

The Purpose & Fallout

The ostensible purpose of restrictive definition of Sikhs in the two acts was that by limiting voting rights to observant kesdhari and amritdhari Sikhs all non-kesdharis will be excluded from voters list and thus became a barrier to any likely attempt [by Hindus] to gain control of Sikh institutions under false pretenses. This along with the elective offices being restricted to amritdharis recognized a three-tier set up with amritdharis as elected officials, observant kesdharis as voters and those who did not sport hair as non-voting Sikhs - thus sanctioning two levels of disenfranchisement in apex Gurdwara management bodies - total for those who cut their hair and partial for observant kesdharis.

The SRM on the other hand created its own stratification. By restricting entry into the sacred space at the holiest Sikh shrines to amritdharis it placed them at the apex. This is reinforced by amritdharis alone constituting Guru Panth that has the authority for making decisions for any directional changes [Article XXIII]. The overall stratification per SRM seems to be amritdharis, be-amritye, sirgunm, non-Sikh devotees, patit Sikhs.

Variants of this model have been used in Gurdwaras in the Diaspora where those hired to provide liturgical services are invariably amritdharis. The management control is tried to be restricted to amritdharis or kesdharis arguing that a *sabat soorat* [complete uncut hair image] should be presented to the mainstream.

Thus we can see the deep contradictions that have arisen in an otherwise egalitarian Sikh societal ethos. The major

Gurdwaras are managed, purse strings controlled and their staff including liturgical employees hired by a group of amritdharis. The apex decision making collective of five takhats is all amritdharis and the authority for making any directional change is also restricted to amritdharis collectively. This has given a tremendous clout to amritdharis to control corporate Sikh understanding of their faith and Sikh worldview. At the same time at least at this juncture of Sikh history the credibility, as perceived by most observers, of amritdhari leadership is at all time low.

This coupled with increase in the proportion of non-kesdharis has created new tensions in the Sikh laity; sharpened by an increasingly assertive non-kesdhari profile and harder positions taken by lay amritdharis who often make an assertion that only amritdharis are Sikhs. Significantly such assertions are made by lay amritdharis and not by those who are engaged in providing liturgical services or are in religious leadership positions. However signs of the rising tension are real and the Sikhs may be headed for a contentious future unless a more inclusive way can be found. We will now try and look at some facets of this tension.

THE GROWING OF TENSION

The experience of Sikhs in the last 60 years in free India has left them wondering about the caliber of their religious and political leadership to look after Sikh interests in the new environment. Fights over leadership of Sikh religious institutions are commonplace. At the same time confidence of the community has been gravely eroded in the leadership by numerous instances of mismanagement and even alleged corruption. Since leadership has been virtually an exclusive domain of amritdharis in both religious and political arenas, these developments have led to increasingly open questioning if being amritdhari could any more be accepted as a credential for being a good Sikh, for being trustworthy or to be the primary leadership resource for the community.

Another trigger is the widely shared perception that quality of awareness, understanding and knowledge of Sikhi of granthies, ragis and kathakars is at best inadequate. With an increasing segment of the congregation not familiar or fluent in Punjabi their ability to communicate with their audiences is severely constrained, especially in the Diaspora. In some cases they also have shown tendencies that are not seen as fitting with their exalted vocation. Being all amritdharis they are not seen, mostly by the youth, as role models or exemplars.

The dramatic spurt in the trend for Sikh youth to give up their hair especially in Punjab is another complicating factor. According to some estimates the incidence could be as high as 80% in some areas. At the same time in the Diaspora immigrant Sikhs also have experienced similar change. Several gave up on their hair to avoid discrimination in their adopted homelands; others may have done it because it made life that much easier to live with certain chores not needed any more. The change seems more visible among kids and youth.

A comment about the demographics - I do not see the 80:20 evident among the attendees at the Gurdwaras including on major festivals when most Sikhs do go to the Gurdwara. It is possible that the presence of amritdharis, many of whom may be providing liturgical services and others who may be Gurdwara functionaries, skews the visual impression. It is also possible that amritdharis and kesdharis are more regular in attending gurdwara services and the youth who are more likely turning monas are not that regular. In spite of these possible factors I apprehend that if amritdharis are 15%, kesdharis could not be less than 30%. A 50/50 divide of those sporting hair and monas may more likely be credible.

The profile of monas is not the same as it used to be either. Till a few decades back, most of the monas were from rural areas - farmers, artisans, scavengers and the like - who went in and out of the kes observance tradition somewhat randomly. Significantly when they moved in and out of kes observance their behavior or attitude as members of sangat

did not change. There also was a sprinkling of those who had faced strong opposition from within the families when they shed their hair. This section of monas usually kept a discretely low profile. Being a small number and surrounded by kesdhari proponents they stuck it out and there are hardly any anecdotes to vouch assertive posturing by them in those days. The mona Sikhs therefore though quite divided into two diverse sub sets were uniformly just seen and not heard.

The picture is changing and monas cannot now be ignored – to some extent in India but more so in the Diaspora. Of the two segments that we looked at, attitudes of the first are possibly staying nearly the same – low profile as members of the sangat but out periods getting longer than before. The other segment now is mostly young adults who see intra-community discriminatory practices as abhorrent. Their numbers are rising, buttressed by accrual of progeny of those who had shed their hair earlier and as times goes by, by their own kids.

In this backdrop the contemporary Sikh discourse on the question of amrit and kes has changed in the manner of its argument. Baisakhi of 1699 is seen to have been a response to historical developments of the time and it is argued that there is no credible evidence that Guru Gobind Singh had made amrit or 5 k's obligatory for all Sikhs. It is also argued that Guru Granth Sahib and writings attributed to Guru Gobind Singh neither sport kes nor do they sanctify any ritual amrit.

Thus the internal debate about visible Sikh identity seems to be acquiring an increasingly sharper tone. We will try and grasp the various facets of this conversation as taking place in our midst. I will be drawing liberally from my own conversations on the subject with several protagonists on the Internet.

THOSE FOR AMRIT - ARGUMENTS & SOME ANALYSIS

The proponents of amrit contend that it is mandatory for all Sikhs and the drift of their arguments runs something like this:

- Since Guru Gobind Singh himself took amrit, how can Sikhs be exempt from this requirement?
- Sikhi spread through example [of amritdharis in Sikh history and struggles] and not through spreading of message of bani.
- Amrit is mandatory for Sikhs. In fact it is only initiation of Amrit that makes one to become Sikh. It is not a choice.
- Amrit give Sikhs the 5 k's and their visible identity. Shedding of Sikh outward appearance will lead to their "assimilation" into Hinduism.
- If an amritdhari and a mona Sikh are alike then why do we have amrit?
- Birth in Sikh family does not make one a Sikh – amrit does.
- Amrit brings nimarata [humility], sehj [equipoise], tranquility, abhyas of nitnem [practice of daily ritual prayers], nearness to guru and a discipline in life.
- Patits can become Sikhs again through amrit.

We will look at each one of these arguments in the light of SRM, Sikh experience and the way some of these assertions are received.

Doing What Guru Gobind Singh Did

The first argument makes a strong case for Guru Gobind Singh is said to have beseeched the elect five to give him the gift of amrit after they had been administered of the same at his hands. There are several messages inherent in this action of the Guru. Firstly he by his example acknowledged the sublime spiritual status of the five demonstrated so vividly by their willingness to offer their lives in response to the Guru's call. Next it emphasized the supremacy of the institution of the elect five among Sikhs. It also was a demonstration of how the baptismal ceremony had to be carried out without the involvement of the Guru's person. Another strong suggestion

seemed to be that the spiritual value of the baptismal transcended spiritual status of the recipient if even the Guru was not above seeking this divine blessing.

The tradition has it that Sikhs at the time did ask if amrit was mandatory and his response was to say it not to be so. It is also said that a very large number of Sikhs did go through the initiation but it is not said anywhere that all did so or that those who did not were then onwards excluded from being Sikhs. Nonetheless the tradition strongly supports that the Guru did receive baptismal from the five elect and has been immortalized in the recital at Sikh religious service 'waho waho gobind singh aapai gur chela'.

There is one caveat that cannot be brushed aside in this context. The Gurus also had in the past developed the institution of masands to be led by select Sikhs but Guru Gobind Singh abolished it because of weaknesses that had crept into the character of appointees. As such it is difficult to accept an argument that the mere act of going through the amrit ceremony can be eternally transforming. An amritdhari has to continue to demonstrate to be worthy of the blessing bestowed by amrit by his/her conduct.

The Force of Example

The second argument makes abundant sense. History gives ample proof that the example did lead to spread of Sikhi. The lives of Gurus were inspiring and during the time of Guru Arjan the Sikh following had already spread far and wide. Gurus selected committed and respected Sikhs to lead the institutional structure that they had created. Consequent to the martyrdom of Guru Arjan the Sikhs admired the courageous example of Guru Hargobind. Likewise after the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur the Sikhs came together to follow the young Guru Gobind Singh. Looking through history one also finds ample evidence as to how the demonstrated merit of the Khalsa inspired Sikhs to join their fold in increasing numbers during the 18th century. The case for the example being a

motivating factor in spread of Sikhi is strong but the examples that inspired clearly were of demonstrated worthy lives rather than mere appearance.

Sikh Only if Amritdhari

The argument about the ritual initiation being mandatory or to take the position that one becomes a Sikh only upon going through the baptismal is not supported by history or by the SRM. Apart from references cited earlier from the SRM there are some more aspects that reflect variously on this issue:

- Dishonoring the hair; eating meat of an animal slaughtered the Muslim way; cohabiting with a person other than one's spouse and using tobacco constitute four transgressions (tabooed practices) that must be avoided by an amritdhari Sikh. In the event of the commission of any of these transgressions, the transgressor must get baptized again. If a transgression is committed the person must seek pardon of the present congregation and accept any punishment that is awarded. However if transgression is committed unintentionally and unknowingly, the transgressor shall not be liable to punishment. [Article XXIV, Section p]
- The SRM says that amritdhari Sikhs are prohibited to associate with a Sikh who had uncut hair earlier and has cut it or a Sikh who smokes. [Article XXIV, p]
- If amritdhari Sikhs commit any of the several prohibitions listed in Article XXIV, Section q they shall be liable to chastisement involving automatic boycott. These prohibitions include default in the maintenance of Sikh discipline [q, 7] and eating or drinking leftovers of the unbaptized or the fallen Sikhs [patit] [q, 2].

The above not only points to Khalsa being held to a more rigorous code of discipline but also brings out that unbaptized kesdharis, sirgunm and patit all are referred to as Sikhs. There is no hint or a suggestion that they cease to be Sikhs.

Choice or Right of Passage

Going through the baptismal has not been included as a rite of passage in the SRM which has a chapter on rites and ceremonies that covers:

- Ceremonies pertaining to Birth and Naming of Child [Article XVII]
- Anand Sanskar: Sikh Matrimonial Ceremony and Conventions [Article XVIII]
- Funeral Ceremonies (Antam Sanskar) [Article XIX]
- Other Rites and Conventions Apart from the above rites and conventions, on every happy or sad occasion, such as moving into a new house, setting up a new business (shop), putting a child to school, etc., a Sikh should pray for God's help by performing the Ardas. [Article XX]

Further the SRM says 'The person to be baptized should not be of very young age; he or she should have attained a plausible degree of discretion.'³³ It thus clearly is a deliberately made choice, by a person in full knowledge and acceptance of the commitments it entails. It also signals a person's clear acceptance of the Khalsa obligations and having moved beyond doubts and second thoughts that seem to afflict so many of us.

Hinduism as a Fallback Position

Suggestion that to give up hair is to be lost to Hinduism is rather infantile in the face of our assertion that we are not Keshdhari Hindus; for if we are not, then why is such a status considered a fall back to Hinduism? Our identity as Sikhs must be rooted in our belief system with ritual observances superimposed - not the other way around. Even though the contemporary experience may indicate that even 2nd/3rd generation mona Sikhs have not got absorbed in the Hindu

33. Article xxiv, d.

pantheon the fear may have justification because of what happened to the sizeable Sikh following among Biharis, Sikligars, Banjaras and the like after the Guru period. Reasons for this are more likely in neglect by Punjabi Sikhs to be inclusive and keep connected with them. The drift of sehjdharis and mazhbis away from Sikhi is also reflective of their continued discrimination within the Sikh pantheon rather than the absence of cementing influence of amrit.

There is one possibility however because of which the reference to being assimilated as Hindus may be relevant. There seems to be an evident preference by Sikh girls to wed monas rather than kesdhari Sikhs with even fewer opting for an amritdhari. There seems to be increased incidence also of Sikh girls marrying non-Sikhs. On the other hand in inter religious unions between Sikh men and Hindu women earlier trend was that the kids were brought up as Sikhs but cursory anecdotal evidence now may suggest that not to be the case.

In the overall the risk of assimilation in the mainstream whether it is Hindus in India or Christians in the West is real though I was surprised at the steadfastness of the small number of Sikhs in Pakistan, Afghanistan and East Africa who in spite of generations of isolation and often living in poverty have been able to successfully protect their identity. This subject however merits further enquiry to grasp the effect of diverse environmental influences on this phenomenon.

Are Amritdhari & Non Amritdhari Sikhs Alike?

The question is asked that if amritdharis and other Sikhs are alike then why create the practice of amrit. We have already seen that the discipline code for amritdharis is more onerous. Looking closely at this code we find the differences to be in the realm of social behavior where amritdharis are subject to certain sanctions for breach of prohibitions. In addition there are certain other expectations of amritdhari Sikhs for example per Article XXIV, Section p and Article XVII, Section q amritdharis:

- Must ever be ready for the service of the Panth and of the Gurdwaras.
- Must tender one tenth [Daswand] of earnings to the Guru.
- Ought to get his wife also baptised.

Amritdharis thus are expected to live up to a more rigorous code and in that respect they are treated differently in the SRM. They also are expected to be exemplars. However it is difficult to say if in practice the remedial measures are enforced or and if so applied as to their effectiveness. Intended to work like an honor system if the person chooses not to come forward the risks of fallout from discovery of any wrong doing, unless egregious, are minimal or at best notional.

Regarding being ready at all times for service again very little information is available to guide us to form an informed opinion. Historical experience as well as ground realities support the impression that amritdhari Sikhs have been ahead in providing leadership to the Panth and the Gurdwaras. This does reflect their readiness to respond to the call of service by the Panth. However in times of distress like the riots in 1947 and the troubled 80's all Sikhs seemed to be responding to the community's needs for help. As for seva in Gurdwaras what one sees at least in the Diaspora is that most of the real seva is done by the monas.

There is however one observation that may be relevant here in that amritdharis certainly do display a greater degree of robustness and relative sense of comfort in the corporate Sikh gatherings as well as interfaith settings. They tend to be aggressively articulate and defend their opinions. This indicates that they have formed opinions about the Sikh way of life possibly because their choice for getting initiated into the Khalsa order was made with discretion and more likely on their own.

Regarding contributing daswandh the position can be verified relatively easily though I am not aware of any attempt ever having been made to analyze the Sikh giving in such a

manner. My impression based on my experience as a Gurdwara functionary is that most of the contributions came from those who were struggling to make ends meet and mostly were monas. Well to do amritdharis, kesdharis and the elitist monas seemed to be among the lesser contributing groups.

In the realm of personal piety the standard of Gurmat Rehni applies equally to all Sikhs. Failings in this area are wide spread but the visibly noticed failings are seen to be those who are shedding their outer form. When we look at the incidences of violence or other forms of untoward behavior within Gurdwara precincts amritdharis may likely be more defaulting. As for failings at the moral, ethical and spiritual plane it is not easy to form opinions but based on stories through the grape wine this problem seems evenly spread even though it must be conceded that it is amritdharis who are more subject to this scrutiny and unfortunately objects of rumor and innuendo.

As for both spouses being amritdharis it seems to be not very common.

Born Sikhs or Not

The SRM says 'The Guru's tenets are: — A Sikh should, in no way, harbor any antipathy to the hair of the head with which his child is born. He should not temper with the hair with which the child is born. He should add the suffix "Singh" to the name of his son & "Kaur" to the name of his daughter. A Sikh should keep the hair of his sons and daughters intact.' [Article XVI, section I] This clearly implies that children born to Sikh parents are considered to be Sikhs as per the SRM and parents are expected to bring them up with kes irrespective of their own choice in the matter.

In this light the claim made by some that Sikhi is not hereditary but has to be earned is at best misplaced as far as our limited subject is concerned. The Gurus did praise a Sikh as being as good as the Guru. That state of Sikhi has to be earned but it does not mean that one is not a Sikh if born into

a Sikh family untill as a Sikh in waiting the person decides, at some point in their life to go through baptismal ceremony to be called or become a Sikh otherwise one would have lived and died a non-Sikh? That would indeed be an incredible position to take.

Some Esoteric Aspects

Some ardent proponents of amrit put forward some very esoteric arguments that go like this - if one follows the example of Guru Gobind Singh, then one needs to receive amrit from the Khalsa. Have you received it from the Khalsa? If so, did you receive it from the Guru or '5 fabulous ones'? If you have received it from the Guru, then no 'humans' were involved. If you have received it from 5 people, then perhaps the quality or lack thereof matters.

This raises some interesting issues not easy of answer. Do we expect that the initiate must believe in those administering amrit as the fabulous ones or should their faith as initiates inspire them to envision those administering as fabulous ones, epitome of the Guru and if that inspiration does not well up within them, their potential for transformation would be adversely influenced? What kind of spiritual or inspirational threshold is expected for one seeking amrit and for being one of the five [or six] who administer the baptism? Is it being suggested that the initiate should choose the five who are evolved and inspire Guru consciousness before accepting to be initiated by them? The SRM does not envisage acceptability of the five to the initiate.

Chip on the Shoulder

There is a clear under current of opinion among lay Sikhs that most amritdharis behave as if they are a cut above the rest. More often this attitude seems to arise out of their feeling that they are the one's that are carrying the Guru's Sikhi forward. Comments such as 'an amritdhari is 100% better Sikh than any other patit or non amritdhari Sikh' or 'if one cuts one's hair

one is zero – that is it, just a zero. Whatever they may otherwise achieve does not matter’ are often heard.

This is unfortunate. However as said earlier such comments are only heard from Sikhs in worldly pursuits and not from those who are engaged day in and day out in liturgical and religious work.

Guru Panth

The SRM says that Panth’s Status of Guruhood named Guru Panth was fostered by all ten Gurus and formalized by the tenth Guru and constitutes the entire body of committed amritdhari Sikhs. Amritdharis therefore do have this special privilege of being members of Guru Panth and thus potentially be a part of the collective of Sikh religious authority. In this light the laws restricting the office bearers to being amritdharis could be seen to be in the spirit of this concept. There is one difference however between what the SRM says and what the law specifies. SRM is specific about **committed** amritdharis constituting the Guru Panth. In other words only those amritdharis who live in consonance with the SRM will constitute Guru Panth though it has not been said how intrusive will that scrutiny be in its application. The law does not envisage any such qualification of amritdharis – the mere act of having gone through the ritual makes one eligible to hold an office under the acts.

Beating up on Monas

Many amritdharis tend to make very disparaging remarks about mona Sikhs. Mostly it is venting their disapproval of the act of dishonoring hair but it gets articulated in the claim that monas are no more Sikhs but can re-enter the faith through baptismal initiation. Unfortunately in trying to promote [or defend] the practice of amrit, such positions are not only not in keeping with the SRM but are also likely to be counter productive and may in fact turn the youth and those wavering against the very objective that they are trying to promote.

OPPOSING VIEWS

We have discussed the amritdhari worldview and arguments in support of amrit tradition. Even though some of the counter arguments have also been articulated in the foregoing analysis, the thrust of opposing themes runs along the following lines:

- No rite can liberate us unless we follow its edicts. Gurbani can liberate us if we live it. Amrit will emancipate us if we follow its edicts.
- Amrit was institutionalised to create dedicated people at a critical time in our history to save dignity and honor of the people, to achieve liberty from the oppressors. Guru Gobind Singh struggled for high principles. Amritdharis have failed to live up to those principles.
- Amrit was not intended to create a political class among Sikhs.
- The number of Sikhs giving up on keeping unshorn hair has increased so much that it is now estimated that as much as 80% of the youth in Punjab do not keep to the tradition. The situation in the Diaspora is nearly the same. With such large numbers Sikhs should decide on reforms through democratic methods.
- There is visible discrimination against non-amritdharis especially the mona Sikhs.
- With changing demographics the Gurdwara managements may in any case not continue to be the preserve of those keeping kes. Sikhs therefore must develop inclusive approaches to avoid continuing conflict.
- How can you stop the wavering? They are listening, watching and waiting for an opportunity or reason to shed their hair.
- Attitudes are changing. People ask questions and must be provided credible answers and explanations. Continued use of fear tactic may not be effective any longer.

The first three arguments have been variously addressed in our discussion so far. There is merit in such arguments if these are equally applied to all believers whether amritdharis or otherwise. Following the edicts is important for all. Decadence has set in across the board and is not confined to amritdharis. Let us now look at the other arguments like use of democratic methods, discrimination felt by monas, effect of changing demographics, vulnerability of the wavering and the challenge of attitudinal changes.

Democracy as a Tool for Reform

The thrust of arguments one hears regarding Sikh reforms [main subjects being amrit, kes, SRM] is that Guru Gobind Singh bequeathed Gurudom jointly to Guru Granth and Guru Panth. The Panth therefore should take into consideration how the majority of Sikhs feel and institute reforms that in essence do not contravene teachings enshrined in Guru Granth Sahib. Mostly those who have given up on their hair advance this argument in the expectation that with large percentage of Sikhs now in that state the majority would move to remove distinctions and treat all shades of Sikhs as equal.

In spite of its simplistic appeal the argument suffers from a serious difficulty in that the authority vested in Guru Panth cannot be exercised by the Panth. Guru Panth as we saw earlier is the collective of committed amritdharis. Even though there is no historical precedence of an activist role by Guru Panth, the collective if it were to deliberate on the issue is not likely to be swayed in favor of what monas wish for. Panth, designated as the corporate Sikh body, does not have any authority. Even though the institution of sarbat khalsa is known to have taken collective decisions for the community in the past it is not clear if sarbat khalsa of 18th century was a collective of all Sikhs or of all Khalsa - if the latter, it would be no different from what is understood by Guru Panth per the SRM.³⁴

It is also questionable if in matters spiritual the human

understanding is that the so-called rule of 51% provides the right answer. Gurus clearly give the message that '*je sabh mil kai akhan paey, vada neh hovai ghat neh jaey*' – God's status will not rise or fall even if all unitedly express any particular view. Likewise divine play goes on notwithstanding our shared anguish '*aitee maar payee kurlaanai tain kee dard neh aya*' – hearing the helpless shrieking of the oppressed did You not feel any compassion? Divine will is not guided by polls!

God is however amenable to and listens to His [true] devotees. There is very powerful message in the verses '*toon bhagtan ke vas hain*' – You are amenable to Your devotees – and '*meri bandhi bhagat chhadaey bandhi bhagat neh chhutai mohe*' – devotees can make me alter what I ordained but I cannot over ride what my devotees decide. This does lend value to collective desire for change of course. The examples of Guru's deferment to sangat and the panj pyaras fall in that genre, but do not point to bowing to the majority.

Religious reform invariably has been led by a charismatic personality who came forward with an alternate vision and then labored through with it. Some succeeded. A lot failed. It is a path that will call for deep thinking, clarity of vision, courage to present the thought, create the following and be prepared to make sacrifices for the cause. Such visionary has not yet been seen or known or caught the imagination of Sikh mainstream.

The Leadership & Discrimination Questions

This is becoming a hot button issue in the Diaspora setting. A preponderant tool to limit leadership positions in Gurdwaras

34. Noted historian J S Grewal writing in Tribune in May 2007 says 'Guru Gobind Singh instituted the Khalsa in 1699 as a political community — Khalsa alone were the true Sikhs for Guru Gobind Singh. — [there] were also the sahajdhari who believed in the ten Gurus and the Guruship of the Granth. They were not keshdhari, but they were seen as an integral part of the Khalsa in the 18th century.' The last observation notwithstanding the institution of sarbat khalsa has been dormant for very long and its revival in the present context will not be easy.

to amritdhari or kesdhari Sikhs is by incorporating an overriding clause in the constitution or by-laws. Unlike the SGPC or DSGMC acts, it is not likely that constitution of any Gurdwara in the Diaspora may deny membership of the General Body to monas. In other words they are not denied voting or membership rights as long as they continue to be members in good standing. It also seems unlikely that the Gurdwara managements would ever opt to restrict membership criteria for the pragmatic consideration that numbers are resource pool for fund raising and for the more arduous yet less visible seva. Those in leadership positions understand this dynamics of numbers very well.

Real question is as to why and how none of the General Bodies so far has tried to amend the Constitution or byelaws in spite of fairly widespread disapproval of such restrictive practices. To my mind such a course of action may have been avoided because of factors such as:

- Most Sikhs seem to believe that there is value to the turban identity when among non-Sikhs and are therefore not resentful to move to install others in their place.
- Sikhs seem to assign higher observance level to kesdharis and amritdharis and prefer liturgical services being performed by them.
- Monas or kesdharis rarely try and contest or challenge amritdharis. It could be because amritdharis are generally more assertive but it could also reflect tacit acceptance of higher spiritual value to amrit in Sikh psyche.

There is one potential distortion however that has always been the anathema of Sikhs and has stoked the siege mentality among them that their religious institutions could be in the line of assault by non-Sikhs, especially Hindus, with the ultimate purpose of assimilating Sikhs into the majority fold by gaining control of these institutions. This as we had noted earlier was the motivation for restricting the voting rights in the acts only to observant kesdharis. Such a ploy is not unknown in Indian

history. Mughals used its obverse very effectively to separate Sikhs from Hindus by ordering that those who sport unshorn hair will be taken as Sikhs and be subject to being hunted, with a prize for every head that was hunted. Even though it is difficult to conclusively establish the existence of conspiracy by Hindus to use this ploy but the other unsavory possibility of Sikhs themselves using such a ruse to pad up their following is supported by a recent report from the UK. Sewa Singh Sidhu writing from Hounslow on Dec. 27, 2007 at GLZ says that 'in this country many Gurdwara management committees are very keen to enrol their Hindu friends as members of Gurdwara to get their votes in elections. They also do not hesitate to enrol Namdharis and Christians just to get votes and stay in power forever. In our local Gurdwara it has been done recently and to find the fact any body can go through their membership lists.'

The problem therefore does not seem to be just one of a liberal concept of equality but is possibly rooted in how most have collectively accepted intra community stratification and the hold of raw no holds barred politics that has come to characterize our Gurdwara managements. With the inner conflict subduing responses of lay Sikhs attempts by those in leadership to continue their hold on power by padding up voter lists by non-Sikhs or by narrowing the exclusionary boundaries further are not rare. I will explain the latter by a couple of examples. In Pennsylvania where I now reside a couple of enthusiasts insisted that monas must not be allowed to perform any liturgical seva such as officiating as granthies, distributing *karah parshad* etc much to the consternation of the management as well as the sangat but had their way nonetheless. In Connecticut a Gurdwara functionary insisted that monas will not be allowed to address in the Gurdwara even if they were eminently qualified to expound on Gurbani for it sets a poor example for the others. He had his way with muted private protest by some.

It is pertinent here that while some restrictive practices

are sanctioned for the five takhats in the SRM, in other Gurdwaras, no Sikh is restricted from performing any seva. As such what transpired in both the above cases was not only not in keeping with teachings of the Gurus but also in contravention of the SRM. Such behaviour also exacerbates tensions within the sangat.

At another plane, the prejudice against monas is carried way beyond not allowing them a share in management or performing some types of seva. As a group we seem to be shy to even acknowledge their accomplishments or service that may be praiseworthy. There are some telling examples. A few years back, during the Internet boom, Sanjeev Sidhu made it to the Fortune list of the richest in the world. I felt pretty elated at his achievement and mentioned it to some of my Sikh activist friends in CT but received a stony silence in response. I asked and the reason was bland 'we do not care for the accomplishments of Sikhs who cut their hair. As far as we are concerned they are no more than a zero.' I even raised the subject of recognition of Diaspora Sikhs' excellence by Govt of India with Tarlochan Singh, then Chair, Minorities Commission. He said he was working towards that but confided that he would recommend only kesdhari Sikhs.

Unfortunately the fact is that we tend to almost disown those who do not have the Sikh look and all this is done little realizing that this phenomenon is not peculiar to Sikhs. If we look around we will find that there are several layers of observance among followers of all faiths but they are not excluded or disowned or hidden from public view. Hopefully we also will grow out of it, as have others.

Use of kes and amrit for creating classes among Sikhs should be avoided. Beginning of the caste system so much castigated by the Gurus also was class. Kashatriyas and Vaish could do any worship at home but organized religious service had to be performed by a Brahmin only. In course of time the stratification became a major vested interest resulting in its divisive and corrosive effects.

This is where our reform movements have been going astray and in spite of such high sacrifices we have not really been able to either reconcile the Guru's inclusive thought and the compelling necessity to define our identity or make any spectacular, abiding thrust in growth or development. Our theology, though possibly the most suited for the contemporary world has been lying safely sacred and sacrosanct in expensive wraps, not understood by the hungering world and hungering Sikhs alike. In the meanwhile we have drifted to practices that over ride Gurbani rather than are in keeping with it.

Turned Tables – Demographics at Play

A development reported from Warrington, England is relevant to our discussion here. The control of Gurdwara in Warrington has passed to a majority committee consisting of mona Sikhs who claim they will bring the community together. In the changed setting it is the turban wearing Sikhs who complain that 'The general tendency is to treat the turbaned bearded "sorts" as outcasts.'

They also say that not once has anyone discussed what the Guru's hukumnama said today or what we should teach the youth. Plenty of Sikh History is talked about and there is lots of good Kirtan. However once when a Dhadi jatha vigorously preached the importance of kes the committee including its president became openly critical and humiliated the Ragi after the service in front of everyone in the langar hall.

This may be a unique occurrence but the change is happening and increasing number of Gurdwaras may experience leadership shift to monas. It is therefore important for us to act now to curb exclusionary tendencies and promote inclusiveness. If we do not cases of perceived discrimination by kesdhari Sikhs as in Warrington may not be rare as days go by. The experience should also make us sensitive to the feelings of monas and bring home the possibility that with changing demographics the control of Gurdwaras will not be easy to be kept within the control of minority amritdharis or kesdharis.

The Wavering: Which way Will They Go

The debate on this subject is in the open and we have seen the variety of views expressed by the proponents of kes and amrit. We also have touched upon the views and arguments presented by those who do not subscribe to kes and amrit as the defining characteristic of a Sikh. While this playing out there is an unidentified pool of those who are wavering and wrestling with the question whether they should continue with the tradition of keeping kes or not. They are subject to varying degrees of transmitted influences to continue with the tradition and a variety of environmental factors that may be counter to this influence. In this setting while some of the amrit proponents have not desisted to raise the spectre of 'hell and brimstone' for those who break from the tradition, some among monas have not been hesitant either to encourage the wavering to follow their example. What follows is from an actual exchange on the Internet. Some who do not subscribe to the kes surely saw it as appropriate intervention while others who believe in the tradition felt it to be irresponsible if not intentionally disruptive.

A young Sikh who was contemplating shedding his hair but was consumed by self-doubt posted a message on a forum seeking advice. While his enquiry clearly showed his deep concern for his likely sense of remorse if he took the step yet he seemed to be looking to get some support so that he could go ahead and shed his hair. One comment offered was a gentle goading saying "Thanks for bringing the plight of this young Sikh to our attention and especially in the absence of parental advice and leaving the difficult decision up to him. I wish some how I could communicate with him and assure him that spirituality does not lie in the symbols of any religion but lies in prayer, meditation on Naam, and service of the humanity."

Let us try and look at the above statement in its context a bit more critically. The message has been very empathetically worded. Notice sympathy for 'plight' of the young Sikh. Notice also that the youth does not have parental advice

available and thus it has become his burden alone to decide what to do. This forlorn boy needs parental advice and must be helped. The advice then is offered – symbols have no value spiritually.

To any objective reader this surely is not the advice expected of a parent who brought up their son with all those self-doubts and sense of possible guilt if he were to take this step. Obviously the outreach extended in the guise of substitute parental guidance would seem to be motivated to gently urge the person to go over the edge.

Let us look at it a bit deeper. We are persuaded to not shy away from righteous causes.³⁵ We are also persuaded that absent true naam ritualistic observances are of no avail to connect with God.³⁶ The first is a clear guide when one is able to identify the righteous course in a complex situation; the second relates to our connecting with the divine where ritualistic symbolism, as the only and preferred mode does not help. Yet the comment on symbolism cannot be construed to imply that giving up symbols by itself is a brave step launching one on to the path of spiritual ascent. There is a fine line that separates crossing or avoidance to breach a restraint. Going over has never been viewed lightly or explained away by quoting homilies for symbolic may not signify a mere symbol - there could be a sublime thought behind the restraint that it promotes. Breaking past such restraints can only lead to a rudderless life lived in pursuit of the self and the worldly, not higher values, so carelessly used as the logic for the decision to get past the dilemma of the moment.

Yes action choices are important and are determinants of how our lives would be judged. Yes ritualism is no substitute for spiritualism. Yet all faiths have and promote certain symbols and follow certain rituals. Will Sikhs become all spiritual and their failings disappear once they cut their hair, shun the kirpan and give up on amrit? Where does one draw the line? Rejection

35. *shubh karman te kabhoo neh taroon* – Dasam Granth.

36. *nanak sachai naam bin kya tikka kya tag* – Asa ki Var.

of some symbols and rituals while submitting to others is at best selective rationalization. I do not advocate symbols or rituals but I do question selectivity approach in their rejection/acceptance.

Another relevant factor is that the young man has to live with the decision he makes and if those who took this road decades back still have not been able to move beyond their own choice then made and continuously keep on giving vent to their inner struggle by loud proclamations of lack of connect between symbols and spirituality and their sense of being discriminated, how can they in fair conscious offer a quick fix to another to go over the edge.

Ultimately in the temporal setting as well as in the court of Akal Purakh the individual has to live with and answer for the choices he makes. Those of us who volunteer counsel will also have to make judgment about righteousness of our motive. Prolific quotes from Gurbani do not necessarily make the discourse theologically, ethically or morally correct. Gurbani can guide us to discover the paradigm that helps us to swim across this difficult and challenging journey of life but such a paradigm essentially will have to have some place for self restraint, personal evaluation of our thoughts and motivations and careful appraisal of what we are trying to promote.

There are umpteen situations in life where things inexorably seem to be moving to some kind of inevitability. The happenings on ground especially in Punjab have momentum of their own for all to see. Ironically even as this spectacle is playing out in our midst it still leaves those in Punjab, who are not taking the step under false pretences but only to get their scalps tattooed as a fashion statement, as spiritually more savvy than others who are trying desperately to link the choice to an expression of their spiritual awareness. That is why the incident is troubling. Considering the enormity of numbers shedding their hair in Punjab and elsewhere the incident by itself is not a trendsetter and could well have been a crank.

In the process however this unsavory discussion has

unraveled certain questions that we should ponder over if our agenda is not limited to taking the 80 or 90 close to 100% and then revert to our traditional warfare on another issue while the drift continues unabated. That would be myopic and surely will not transform the counselor or the counseled.

Some Emerging Positions

Some of the first generation monas display remorse at breaking away from the tradition but the second generation do not seem to be troubled by such doubts. In other words the attachment to 5k's seems to be receding from their minds as time goes by. Among older adults, there is a growing number of urbanite educated monas who have a grasp of the essence of Gurbani and the historical evolution of Khalsa tradition. They prefer rational approaches and tend to apply the Guru Granth criteria to test the validity of rituals and ritual observances. They take comfort that their choice of shedding hair passes this test.

The voices that one hears show conviction that kes or amrit do not have any transforming value though there are rare interpretations acknowledging the tradition's uplifting as well as transforming influence during the trying times of the tumultuous 18th century. A view is also expressed that the Khalsa accomplishments of the 18th century preceded any of the rahitnamas. In other words the rahitnamas have had a constraining influence and have restrained the free spirit and the sense of being sovereign that Khalsa believed in and that brought them success against very heavy odds. The SRM therefore is not in the interest of Sikh development and growth.

They strongly defend being Sikhs but assert that being non-Khalsa is more a matter of belief [in righteousness of the choice as per Gurbani] rather than non-adherence to praxis or tradition. To say that being non-Khalsa is primarily a matter of conscientious belief is a strong repudiation of the popular persuasion that promotes Sikhs to imbibe amrit and aspire to become Khalsa. So far there is no evidence of any serious

work done to develop this theme or to develop its theology from within the Sikh scriptural literature, history, experience and tradition. If that happens Sikh panth could face major reform pressures from within.

CONCLUDING

In the above discussion several arguments both question and draw on historical evidence or theological interpretation. It is well recognized that both recording of historical events and interpretation of historical evidence can be subjective. That is why accounts of the same events by different writers and their analysis by various historians are found to be significantly different. There are therefore limitations to using history for validating complex concepts. In any case because of gaps in Sikh history we are still trying to grasp how the concepts of miri piri, guru panth, panj pyare, sarbat khalsa, hukamnamas and the like worked in practice in the absence of a formal cleric order.

Theological search also has limitations because of the way Guru Granth Sahib is written and edited. Routines, rituals, ceremonies are not spelt out or codified. Thus interpretive approach in their case too can be subjective and susceptible to same kind of skepticism as historical evidence. We could in our understanding use some exhortations in Gurbani to construct or to test validity of some of the ways that we have received the transmitted tradition but not develop a well-defined model. Let us take an example. Gurbani tells us that Guru is always in our midst and manifest in sangat. There is mention of dharamsal, gurdwara, kirtan, katha, ardas and langar obliquely somewhere in the background - but no clear markers that help us to construct the way a Gurdwara should function from Gurbani alone. Selective use of Gurbani to accept or reject what the tradition has come to pass on as tenets of the faith or its core practices and observances thus may lead to pitfalls.

In view of these difficulties received tradition may be a

more credible guide than we tend to normally think. It is representative of collective understanding by the believers even if it is not codified. It also has an element of continuity though distortions and changes would happen over time and in response to local environments. The core shared-understanding however does get transmitted and that core can be easily identified within the overall package transmitted.

To me the core tradition about being a Sikh seems to be:

- If born in Sikh family, one is a Sikh. There is mention of 'gurcharni lagana' or 'matha tikana' and 'dastar bandhi' ceremonies but these are not prescriptive.
- Transition from sehjdhari to kesdhari traditionally has involved no ceremony. It happened within families and there is sufficient empirical evidence to show that it was mostly an informal process.
- Mixed marriage situations also suggest an informal transition of the non-Sikh spouse to becoming a Sikh in cases where such change may have happened.
- Conversion by choice or missionary persuasion has been largely through the ceremony of khande ka pahul.
- Choice of a believer to imbibe amrit has been voluntary. It also has been seen as progression to a higher level of commitment.
- The surviving tradition does not indicate any legacy of charan pahul as initiation rite though charan dhur and water from sarovars [amrit] continue to be objects of veneration.

There are three change points that could have radically impacted this transmitted tradition if the purpose at the time was clearly and categorically to formalize the process. The first Vaisakhi of 1699, then Singh Sabha and amrit parchar movements of late 19th/early 20th centuries and then promulgation of SRM in 1945 - in all the three the direction of change was towards promoting khande ka pahul. The ground reality however is that no one so far has been denied the right

to claim to be a Sikh if the person so chooses and *khande ka pahul* continues to be practised as a choice by an individual and not an obligation for all Sikhs. This understanding has informed Sikh praxis and has survived as well as served the purpose of providing a shared anchoring in the faith in spite of its visible identity variants. We must note that this surmise is not influenced by the political compulsions to define the voting rights for purposes of SGPC, DSGMC or other institutional positions.

Nonetheless we must ask ourselves why are we so obsessed with the question - who is a Sikh? I do not see other faiths so concerned about who claims to be one of them. There is hardly any such exclusionary conversation among Hindus, Christians, Buddhists or Jews - within sects yes, broadly under the umbrella faith, no. In Islam a verbal affirmation is enough for being a Muslim.

Theologically Amrit necessarily relates to inner search and realization within of eternal truths. It is a state of being, a stage of elevation achieved through living in truth and with the benevolent grace of the Guru. Sikhi is a path on which one's spiritual progression is determined by one's '*rehni*' or the ethico-spiritual quality in the way one lives. Any ritual amrit should help put us along this path and not be construed to impart instant elevated status or to distance those not observant in outer form from the Guru.

Let us therefore try to understand what is it that inspires us. It would seem incongruous that we cover our heads going into Gurdwara and submit to several ritualistic practices but question others for lack of clear scriptural authority. In the ultimate analysis Sikh's relation with the divine is personal but it is linked strongly to the social. The first gives us our choices but the second increases the burden on us to be socially responsible - best discharged by translating in our lives humble acceptance that Truth is not the same as our sense of the reasoned and rational.

Sikhs are easily persuaded to donate in the name of the

Guru and are not evaluative about the end use of their giving. As such even those Gurdwaras that may have permitted egregious intra community discrimination to take place have not felt money crunch. One can only hope that the youth will eventually succeed where we seemingly have not been able - to promote a constructive, inspiring, inclusive and involved sangat playing the role in our corporate Sikh lives as Gurus envisioned for it.

For too long the trend for this wind of change getting stronger is visible. For too long we have persevered with insistence by several that those with Bana are superior to those not in Bana, whatever their demonstrated behavior. For too long we have tried to keep lids on the problem with the fear of Tankhah and Patit-ta. It could not have worked and it is not working. Sikhi is about lifting people, whatever their level - not an exclusive association of those who consider themselves already lifted. To use it to subserve worldly interests of any group be they amritdhari, kesdhari, mona or Punjabi is a disservice to the Gurus and their universal message. Concern for preserving the observance of kakkars is well placed but we should do our best to bring those who may have deviated back into observance through love and persuasion.

Break up into sects like Orthodox, Conservative and Reform can come but it is not sure if that will solve these problems. One can however envision bigger problems because being a faith with very weak cleric order we could be struggling with issues of clerical authority and related questions in emerging sects. The answer for us seems to be to stay together; accept one another as we all strive to connect with the divine through the teachings of the Gurus. Let us imbibe the sublime message of the Gurus that bestowing His mercy Akal Purakh accepts us without dwelling upon our merits or demerits.³⁷

37. *gun avgun prabh kachhoo neh beechareo kar kirpa apuna kar kiya* - Bilawal MV, p. 829.

SEVA: SIKH PRECEPT & PRAXIS

The word *seva* is of ancient origin. It does not have an equivalent in English but conveys the sense of service, voluntary or in employment; caring; worship; love and adoration. It also carries a connotation of charity. Thus to bring together the concept of *seva* one has to look at the ingredients of all these activities, their underlying motivations and place in the social ethics and belief system.

The concept of *seva* is not unique to any particular faith. In fact all traditions endorse the practice, though understandably there are differences in emphasis and the way it has been practiced. Hinduism commends selfless service, *nishkamya seva*, without expectation of reward. Giving to Brahmins and the poor has been considered an act of charity. Christian thought considers charity to be a divinely infused habit, inclining human will to cherish God and man for the sake of God – love God and love thy neighbor – teaches the Bible [Luke 15]. The precedence for the choice of recipient seems to be self, wife, children, parents, brothers and sisters, friends, domestics, neighbours, fellow-countrymen, and then others. Judaic charity was broadly national in its origin; the Torah however calls to care for 'the alien and the stranger in your land.' In Islam the act of giving is greatly stressed though in practice it seems to have been extended to the co religionists.

To explore the various facets of the concept of *seva* in Sikh thought, we will look at the usage of the related terms as it emerges from the scriptural literature and also look at the praxis as evidenced by Sikh living today and in history.

SEVA IN SIKH THOUGHT

Broadly the word *seva* has been used in the Sikh scriptures for serving or being obedient and subservient in secular sense and serve the needy and the *sangat* as well as to revere, love, and worship the divine as a part of one's spiritual quest. We hope to find that as a whole life faith, Sikh thought would have an integrated concept of *seva*, where both the social ethic and moral imperatives come together to encourage and reinforce devotee's instincts for service and altruism.

Guru Nanak commended the triad of *nam*, *dan* and *isnan* – *nam*, charity and inner purity [also external cleanliness]¹ which continue to serve as a concise definition of Sikh ethos. McLeod says 'one achieves [freedom from cycle of transmigration] primarily through the practice of *nam simran* or meditation on the divine Name, though it is also assisted by alms-giving [*dan*] and necessarily involves pure living [*isnan*].'² All three precepts in thought as well in praxis underpin the concept of *seva*. Sikhs are persuaded to surrender themselves to the Guru totally, body, mind and materials – *tan, man, dhan* – and live per Guru's teachings to achieve union with the Divine.³ All the three forms of devotion are important in this quest or *seva*.

At the level of popular understanding Sikh ethos is summed up in three guiding injunctions – *nam japna*, *kirt karni*, *vand chhakna* – reciting *nam*, earning by hard, honest work and sharing what one earns, eats or has. According to W. Owen Cole, '*Kirat* is central to the Sikh concept of *seva* or self-abnegating deeds of service. In *seva* no task is considered inferior or degrading; in fact the humbler the task the more honorable it is considered for the Sikh engaged in *seva*.' Regarding interlinking of the three injunctions he says that '*kirat karni* is

1. *gurmukh nam dan isnan, gurmukh laagai sehj dheyan* – Ramkali M I, *Sikh Ghost*, p. 942.

2. McLeod, W H, *Who is a Sikh?* OUP, 1989, p. 2.

3. *tan man dhan sabh saunp gur ko hukam maniai paiai* – Ramkali Anand M III, p.918.

on the one hand associated with and conditioned by *nam japna*⁴ — [and] on the other, *kirat*, sanctified by *nam*, must fulfil the mandatory injunction of *vand chhakna*.⁵ Thus all the three injunctions guiding the way a Sikh should live his life are intrinsically embedded in the concept of serving and sharing.

Another mnemonic expression, going back to the Guru's time, summing up Sikh ideals is *deg, tegh, fateh*. Sikhs also adopted these three words for inscription on their seals and coins when they succeeded in establishing suzerainty over parts of North India in the early eighteenth century. The word *deg* carries the connotation of general benevolence, *tegh* of protecting the good from evil and *fateh* of victory in this righteous endeavor. This twin concept of charity and valor is also inherent in the Sikh ideal of *sant sipahi* or saint soldier — both characteristics leading to the objectives served by *seva*.

At another level, the supplication for *sarbat ka bhala* in the concluding line of *ardas* gives expression to the Sikhs prayer that their day should be filled with deeds to secure the well being of all. This also flows from the Sikh belief that God is an epitome of both being the master and *sevak*⁶ and that — *vidya veecharee ta parupkari* — the end of spiritual learning is to be of service and do well to others.

In Sikh thought charity and *seva* both help the devotee to grow spiritually even as he tries to promote betterment of others. *Seva* and altruism must be an expression of love, not of pity or reciprocity for as the Guru says 'one who is good if good is done unto him and not otherwise, does not love but only trades in love.'⁷ Make your supplication in ever so many ways to the divine that such love is for the low of the lowest — all, not limited to the like-minded or co religionists or in return.⁸

4. *hath paon kar kam sabh cheet niranjan nal* — Slok Kabir p. 1376.

5. The Encyclopaedia of Sikhism, Patiala, 1997, Vol III, p. 162-63.

6. *aape thaakur aape sevak sabh aape aapi govindae* - Bilawal M IV, p. 800.

7. *changey changa kar maney mandey manda hoey, aasaq ahu neh aakhiey jeh lekha vartey soey* - Var Asa, Slok M II, p.474.

8. *seva karo das dasan ki anik bhant tis karo nihora* — Gauri M V, p.204.

NAAM DAAN ISNAAN

Let us dwell a bit on what Gurbani says on naam, daan and isnaan, the triad that sums up the Sikh ethos. Guru Nanak says that these three attributes are the defining characters of a Guru oriented, righteous person vis-à-vis the self-centered. Witness: 'Gurmukh is blessed with naam, daan and isnaan; he centers his meditation on Akal Purakh — does good deeds and inspires others to do so. Gurmukh unites with the Divine, O Nanak.⁹ On the other hand the self-willed, manmukh, does not remember naam, does not give in charity, and does not cleanse his consciousness; verily his body rolls in dust.¹⁰

In this triad naam is critical but the holistic Sikh way persuades the believers to be guided by all the three. They must endeavor to still the wayward minds. The Guru says 'the mind of those intoxicated by maya and enticed by greed is deluded by God Himself and like a vagrant it wanders in ten directions — such people do not practice naam, charity or inner cleansing nor for an instant sing praises of God. Clinging to falsehoods does not edify the mind nor helps in understanding of the self.'¹¹ However if one is blessed with the treasure of naam the mind is fully satiated. It senses that the all-knowing searcher of inner urges is always alongside and recognizes Him as the cause of all that comes to pass. With grace of the Guru and radiant of face he practices naam daan isnaan and his anger, greed and carnal desires get subdued and pride curbed.¹²

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9. *gurmukh naam dhaan eisanaan gurmukh laagai sehaj dhhaian — gurmukh karanee kaar karaaeae naanak gurmukh mael milaeeae — Ramkali M I, p. 942.*
 10. *naam dhaan eisanaan n manamukh thith than dhhoorr dhhumaeae — Sorath M I, p. 596.*
 11. *dhhaaeiou rae man dheh dhis dhhaaeiou. maeiaa magan suandh lobh mohiou thin prabh aap bhulaaeiou — naam dhaan eisanaan n keeou eik nimakh n keerath gaeeiou naanaa jhooth laae man thokhiou neh boojhiou apanaaeiou — Todi M V, p. 712.*
 12. *man keeaa eishhaan pooreeaa paeiaa naam nidhhaan antharajaamee sadhaa sang karanaihaar pashhaan gur parasaadhee mukh oojalaa jap, naam dhaan eisanaan kaam krodhi lobh binasiaa thajiaa sabh abhimaan — Sri Rag M V, p. 46.*

Blessed thus by divine grace inner joy knows no bounds. 'With my eyes, I gaze upon the blessed vision of the Guru and touch my forehead to his feet. As my feet tread path of the Guru my hands wave the fan over him. Within my heart, I meditate day and night on His undying form. Having renounced all possessiveness I place my faith in the all-powerful Guru. The Guru blesses me with the treasure of naam that rids me of all suffering. Come my siblings, imbibe and enjoy this boon of naam. Firm of faith in naam, charity and self-purification; share always the Guru's teachings for the blessing of intuitive poise connects with God and fear of the messenger of death goes away.'¹³

Bhai Gurdas has also expounded on the theme variously. He says 'the formless One took form as Guru [Nanak] who accepted persons from all the four varnas [castes] as disciples, founded the abode of truth in the form of congregation of the seekers and persuaded them all to meditate on one God. The Guru explained grandeur of sabad beyond the Vedas and the Katebas. Those who had indulged in scores of evils were made to understand naam, daan and isnaan. They developed detachment from maya even as they lived in its midst and learnt to meditate upon God. Bringing the twelve sects together, Guru founded the high path of gurmukhs. Those following that path attained inner peace and went up the ladder of honor.'¹⁴ Sharing thought on nam, dan, and isnaan gurmukhs show the

13. *nainee dhaekho gur dharasano gur charanee mathhaa pairee maarag gur chaladhaa pakhaa faeree hathhaa akaal moorath ridhai dhhiaaidhaa dhin rain jpanthhaa mai shhaddiaa sagal apaaeino bharavaasai gur samarathhaa gur bakhasiaa naam nidhhaan sabho dhukh lathhaa bhogahu bhunchahu bhaaeaho palai naam agathhaa naam dhaan eisanaan dhirr sadhaa karahu gur kathhaa sehaj bhaeiaa prabh paaeiaa jam kaa bho lathhaa -- Maroo M V, p. 1101.*

14. *nirankaar aakarakar gur moorath hoe dhhiaan dharaayaa chaar varan gurasikh kar saadhi sangath sach khandd vasaayaa vaedh kathaebahun baaharaa akathh kathhaa gur sabadh sunaayaa veehaan andhar varathamaaan guramukh hoe akeeh lakhaayaa maayaa vichi oudhaas kar naam dhaan eishanaan dhirraayaa baareh panthh eikathr kar guramukh gaaddee raah chalaayaa path pourree charr nij ghar aayaa -- Var 18, Pauri 14.*

path to be free from bondage of life and death. Associating with gurmukh is to be in company of the holy that brings liberating merit to even animals, ghosts and the fallen ones. Those who help others are dear to the Guru.¹⁵

Talking of Sikhs of the Guru he says 'they take in the ambrosial word of Guru that helps control their minds. They fetch water, fan the sangat and feed wood in the firebox of the kitchen. Listening to gurbani they write and help others write hymns of the Gurus. They practice naam, charity and ablutions. Humility marks their stance. Sweet of speech they eat what they earn from their own labor.¹⁶ Becoming kind, the Guru recites true mantra Waheguru to his Sikh. Given this capital of devotion the Sikh falls at the feet of Guru and the whole world bows to the Sikh. The Guru eradicates propensities for being contrarion, lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego and instills contentment, truth, dharma, naam, daan and isnaan in Sikhs. One who internalizes teachings of the Guru is known as a Sikh of the Guru.¹⁷ Others who fake in the holy congregation that they are paying heed to the word of the Guru but do not adopt it in their living will not gain any merit in their life.'¹⁸

It is clear from the above that the Gurus greatly commended the Sikhs to follow practice of naam, daan and isnaan as guiding

15. *bandhan mukat karaaeidaa naam daan isnaan veechaarae guramukh sukhafal saadh sang pasoo paraet patit nisataarae par upkaaree guroo piaarae* – Var 16, Pauri 7.

16. *anmrith vaanee chakh man vas aaeiaa paanee pakhaa peehi bhath jhukaeiaa gurabaanee sun sikh likh likhaaeiaa naam dhaan eisanaan karam kamaaeiaa niv chalan mith bol ghaal khavaaeiaa* – Var 20, Pauri 6 *saigur purakh dayal hoe vaahiguru sach mantr sunaayaa sach raas rehiraas dae paireen pai jag paireen paayaa kaam karodhh virodhh har lobh moh ahankaar tajaayaa sat santokh dhaeiaa dharam dhaan naam eishanaan dhirraayaa gur sikh lai gur sikh sadhaayaa* – Var 11, Pauri 3.

17. *sathigur purakh dhaeiaal hoe vaahiguroo sach manthr sunaayaa sach raas rehiraas dhae paireen pai jag paireen paayaa kaam karodhh virodhh har lobh moh ahankaar tajaayaa sath santhokh dhaeiaa dharam dhaan naam eishanaan dhirraayaa gur sikh lai gur sikh sadhaayaa* – Var 11, Pauri 3.

18. *saadhh sangath gurashabadh sun guramukh panthh n chaal chalandhae kapatt sanaehee fal n lehandhae* – Var 17, Pauri 3.

principles in their lives. As we noted earlier daan is suggestive of a more direct connection with seva, our subject. Let us now explore how did the Gurus look at the practice of daan within the totality of their teachings.

DAAN

Daan, or giving in charity, is considered a virtuous act in Gurbani. Giving in charity and donations are placed in the same league as virtuous qualities and ritualistic observances like austerities and cleansing baths. Company of the holy is placed higher as determinant of a person's spiritual endeavor. Guru Nanak says 'you do not practice truth, abstinence, self-discipline or humility; the ghost within your skeleton has turned to dry wood. You have not practiced charity, donations, cleansing baths or austerities. Absent company of the holy, your life has gone in vain.'¹⁹

Guru Ram Das clarified that possession of wealth is not a hindrance to spiritual pursuit provided the assets are open for use by the holy and saintly. Guru Arjan also says that if a person does not give anything in charity and he does not serve the saintly wealth does not do him any good at all.²⁰ Therefore wealth may help in spiritual pursuit only if shared as charity or to serve those engaged in virtuous causes. Sharing of tainted wealth brings no merit. Likewise charitable acts of those who make pilgrimages to sacred shrines, observe ritualistic fasts and make donations to charity but take pride in being altruistic are useless, like the elephant, which takes a bath, and then rolls in the dust.²¹

Guru's emphasize that charities, pilgrimages, austerities and compassion bring miniscule merit,²² as against being imbued

19. *jat sat sanjam seel n raakhya pret pinjar mehi kaasatt'bhaya punn daan isnan n sanjam sadhhasangat bin baadh jaeya* - Ramkali M I, p. 906.

20. *daan punn nehee santan seva kit hee kaaj n aya* - Todi M V, p. 712.

21. *teerath barat ar daan kar man mai dharai gumaan nanak nihafal jaat tih jio kunchar isanan* - Slok M IX, p. 1428.

22. *teerathh tap deya dath daan jae ko paavai til kaa maan* - Jap ji M I, p. 4.

with naam that brings merit equivalent of taking millions of cleansing baths and giving of billions and trillions in charity.²³ Nanak gives the reason saying that 'If I made donation of castles of gold and gave lots of wondrous elephants and fine horses and in charity; if I gave donations of land and cows - even then, pride and ego would still be within me.'²⁴

It is not just in giving but also in acquisition of wealth that ethical and moral principles are emphasized. Laments Guru Arjan 'I used up my breath of life, sold my self-respect, begged for charity, committed highway robbery, and dedicated my consciousness to the love and pursuit of acquiring wealth. I kept it secretly hidden from my friends, relatives, companions, children and siblings. I ran around practicing falsehood consuming my body and I kept growing old. I associated with fickle maya and gave up religious vows, good deeds, righteousness, Dharma, self-discipline, purity, and all good ways. Lost, I wandered reincarnating variously as beasts, birds, trees and mountains — O Nanak, society of saints saved me while others, intoxicated with maya, have gone, leaving everything behind.'²⁵

There are thus limitations to daan alone as of avail in spiritual pursuit or in lieu of seva. It helps but it has to be a part of a composite, holistic mode of virtuous living.

DASWANDH

Guru Amar Das is said to have initially conceived a Sikh custom similar to *tithes* [10%] among Jews and Christians and *zakat*

23. *kot majan keeno isnaan. laakh arab kharab deeno daan. jaa man vaseo har ko naam* - Gauri M V, p. 202.

24. *kanchan kae kott dat karee bahu haivar gaivar daan bhoom daan gooaa ghanee bhee antar garab gumaan* - Sri Rag M I, p. 62.

25. *praan maan daan mag johan heet cheet dae lae lae paaree saajan sain meet sut bhaaee taahoo tae lae rakhee niraaree dhaavan paavan koor kamaavan eih bidh karat oudh tan jaaree karam dharam sanjam such naemaa chanchal sang sagal bidh haaree pas pankhee birakh asathaavar bahu bidh jon bhramiou ati bhaaree— nanak sant charan sang udharae hor maaeiaa magan chalaе sabh daaree* - Savaiye M V, p. 1388.

[2 ½%] in Islam. Termed *daswandh* Guru Ram Das enjoined it to be 10% of a Sikh's income that was to be given to the Guru, who then used the collections for supporting the activities under his ministry. The tradition has it that Masands collected the Daswandh contribution from Sikhs in their jurisdiction and sent it to the Guru. Over time Masands became corrupt and Guru Gobind Singh abolished their office asking Sikhs to send their daswandh directly to the Guru – a part also of the direct Khalsa-Guru relation paradigm.

Daswandh was an obligation and was utilized by the Gurus for purposes as they deemed most suitable for the contemporaneous needs whether it was for langar, wells, baolis, dharamsals, arms, horses, security and other community needs. Hukumnamas do show instances where the Gurus asked for specific items to be sent to them for imminent and present purposes. The offering could be made in cash or kind and it was customary for devotees to bring a portion of freshly harvested food grains or other gifts to the Gurus. Even today it is not uncommon to observe many devotees bringing cooked food, sweets and snacks to the Gurdwara for serving to the congregation or others visiting.

Gurbani does not speak of daswandh, but it does of daan and seva. As we have seen seva has the connotation both of prayerfulness or devotion to the divine and altruistic service. Daan is the act of giving [and seeking when in need]. While giving of daan continued at the individual level tradition of daswandh provided the much-needed resources to support collective seva at the community level by the Gurus. It also helped institutionalizing of seva and bringing the praxis closer to the precept.

MOTIVATION FOR SEVA

The urge for seva is universal and is not restricted to humans. Gurbani says that all the beings are continuously engaged in God's service²⁶ and even as all of them belong to that one

26. *jee jant sabh taa ki seva* – Maroo M V, p.1084.

Creator, none can earn any merit without *seva*.²⁷ The motivation for *seva* therefore is inherent in consciousness, susceptible to being cultivated or suppressed.

At the level of humans, even though the instinct for *seva* may be intrinsic, for most the spirit finds expression in hard toil and work in worldly pursuits. Such effort is necessary but is not commended absent concurrent purity of conduct and spiritual growth of the individual. Guru Tegh Bahadur laments 'to who shall I speak of the condition of man's mind? Lured by greed, hoping to gain wealth, he runs in all directions. For securing his comfort he endures pain and waits on every one, like a dog wandering from door to door, not ever thinking of meditating on God [who has given all that we have].'²⁸ In a similar strain flows the thought that those who abandon *seva* of the One who supports all and serve the illusory material world – *maya* – are engaged in vain deeds and live an egoistic life. Such people are perverse and blind.²⁹ The Guru also questions as to how can one hope to achieve a place in the Divine realm if he keeps serving sundry worldly bosses.³⁰

The motivation for *seva* should therefore inspire one to serve God for blessed is the *sevak* whose love for God endures to the end – he serves God in life and enshrines His love in his heart while departing — Such a *sevak* is blessed and fruitful is his coming for he will realise the Lord.³¹ With such lofty possibility motivation to engage in *seva* is really a divine gift and comes to those who are so destined.³² Gurbani refers to

27. *Jete jee tete sabh tere vin seva phal kissai nahin* – Asa MI, p.356.

28. *birtha kaho kaun sio man ki, lobh garsio dashoo dis dhawat aas lageyo dhan ki, such ke het bahut dukh pavat sev karar jan jan ki, duareh duar soan jio dolaat neh sudh ram bhajan ki* – Asa M I, p. 411.

29. *dharnidhar tiag neech kul seveh hau hau karat behavath, phokat karam kareh agyani manmukh andh kahawath* – Maroo M V, p. 1001.

30. *aḥae tabae kee chaakaree kio daragah paavai* – Asa M I. P. 420.

31. *sevak ki orak nibh –ee preet, jeewat sahib seveo apna chalte rakheo cheet — dhunn sevak safal ouhu aaeiaa jin Naanak khasam pashaataa* –Maroo M V, p.1000.

32. *ja ke mastak bhag so seva laiya* – Asa M V, p. 457.

– *har seva* - seva of God, seva of Guru and seva of those serving God. We will now briefly look at each to grasp their import and inter connectedness in serving the divine purpose.

HAR SEVA

Sikh persuasion is to serve, love, adore, believe in and worship one God, referred more frequently as *har* in Gurbani.³³ Dedicated and single-minded seva of *har* is sure to take the Guru oriented devotee to Hari's lotus feet.³⁴ The experience of living a life of service to God is unique. The sense of tranquility and peace that descends on such people is way more sublime than the elation that may be induced in a king by his feeling of unfettered power and authority.³⁵

The motivation to do seva comes to those who receive the grace of *har* and their sins are forgiven.³⁶ They receive God's beneficence and their desires for the four *padarath* – traditionally thought to be the four desired outcomes of human action viz *kama* [life's pleasures], *artha* [economic well being], *dharma* [duty toward virtuous values] and *moksha* [liberation] – are satisfied.³⁷ Those that serve Har are absorbed into His being, attain freedom from the cycle of birth and death³⁸ and become abiding as the supreme transcendent God is abiding.³⁹

The way to perform God's seva is severally described in the Granth and I will pick on one composition by Guru Arjan:

In various ways render thy service to God. Place your life, soul and wealth before Him. Forsake your ego, carry water, wave the fan and demonstrate your love to be a sacrifice to Him. O my mother happy is the

33. *eko saevae avar na doojaa* - Bhairon M V, p.1136.

34. *har ki seva saphal hai gurmukh pavai thaaye* – M III, p. 86.

35. *jo sukh prabh gobind ki seva so sukh raj neh lahuje* – Gauri Kabir, p. 336.

36. *kar kirpa apni seva laayaa sagla durt mitaeya* – Parbhati M V, p. 1338.

37. *char padarath har ki seva* – Majh M V, p. 108.

38. *jin seviaa jin seviaa meraa hari jee te hari hari roop samaasee* - Asa M IV
So Purkh, p. 11.

39. *thir paarbraham parmaesaro saevak thir hosee* - Maru Var M V, p. 1100.

wife who is pleasing to her Lord – I seek her company and will ever be the water carrier for maids of her handmaids and cherish dust of their feet. I will get her society if I am so destined and when it pleases Him get to meet my Swami to whom I will surrender all my meditation, austerities and rituals and offer what merit my dharmic deeds and my respectful devotion may have. I have renounced all false pride and attachment and become dust of feet of those in whose company my eyes may catch a glimpse of my Lord. I thus ponder over my Lord every moment and this is expression of my service unto Him.⁴⁰

Total surrender, forsaking of ego, deep sense of humility, abiding unquestioning love with nothing, physical, mental or material held back defines the way.

GURU SEVA

The Granth is replete with references to the Guru-Sikh relation. Guru dispels darkness and shows the way. The Sikh in return has to be committed to the teaching of the Guru. This relationship of submission to the Guru's teachings is the essence of Guru seva and without thus imbibing the Guru's word the Sikh cannot find the path of true devotion to the Divine.⁴¹ Consummation of such a relationship and the opportunity to perform seva comes only through Divine grace.⁴²

For Guru seva one must reach a state of total submission, and give up all thoughts of self-conceit.⁴³ Once conceit is subsumed

40. *anik bhant kar seva kariye, jeeo pran dhan aagey dhareeay, pani pakha karo taj abhiman, anik bar jayiai kurban, sai suhagan jo prabh bhai, tis kai sang milio meri mai – rahau – dasan dasi ki panihar, un ki rain basey ji nal, mathai bhag te pavo sang, milay swami apney rang, jaap taap devo sabh nema, karam dharma arpo sabh homa, garbh moh taj hovo rein, un kai sang dekho prabh nain, nimakh nimakh ehi aradho, dinas rein eh seva sadhau – Asa M V, p. 391.*

41. *gur seva bin bhagat nieh hoi – Parbhati Ashtpadi M I Bibhas, p. 1342.*

42. *nadri satgur seviye nadri seva hoi – Vadhans M III, p. 558.*

and one accepts the guiding will of the Guru his toil and seva will yield *nam* to well up within his consciousness.⁴⁴ For indeed real seva of the Guru is to ponder over and internalize the *sabad*.⁴⁵

Seva of the Guru brings tremendous benefits. It purifies one's conscious, brings inner peace and removes the veil of darkness of ignorance.⁴⁶ One gets an understanding not only of all the three regions in the universe i.e. the totality of world external to the man⁴⁸ but one is also able to grasp his inner self through seva of the Guru.⁴⁹ It is only by serving the True Guru that liberation is obtained.⁵⁰

The interconnection between the Guru, shabad and the devotee's search for the divine is inherent in this concept.

JAN SEVA

Service of the meek, virtuous person is most meritorious. The Guru asks the boon to be made the slave of slaves of those humble beings who are God's servants continuously meditating on Him. To serve them is the highest service.⁵¹ The Guru persuades that this service be performed, not just by donating money, but by doing it personally, with one's own physical effort and inner devotion, with the songs in loving praise of God on one's lips.⁵² The emphasis is on seva through one's own personal effort, be it using physical or intellectual assets that one is endowed with.

43. *satigur kee saevaa gaakharree sir deejai aap gavaae* – Slok M III, p.649.

44. *satigur kaa bhaanaa mann layee vichahu aap gavaai.eha seva chaakree naam vasaai manni aai*, Sri Rag M III, p.34.

45. *gur ki seva sabad veechar* – Gauri M I, p. 223.

46. *gur ki seva chakri man nirmal sukh hoye* – Sri Rag M I, p. 61.

47. *gur seva te man nirmal hoe agyan andhera jaye* – M III, p. 593.

48. *gur seva te tribhuvan sojhi hoye* – Asa M III, p. 423.

49. *gur seva te aap pachhata* – Asa M I, p. 415.

50. *naanak bin satigur saevae mokh na paaeae* – Sri Rag ki Var, p.88.

51. *jo jan dhiaveh har har nama tin dasan daas karau ham rama jan kee seva ootham kama* – Gauri Guareri M IV, p. 164.

52. *tan man arap karo jan seva rasna har gun gao* – Devgandhari M V, p. 533.

Serving humble beings whose minds are imbued with the formless Lord, *Jan seva* is path to liberation. Even as all bow in humble respect to such persons Nanak prays for God's merciful blessing to be put on their path.⁵³ Seva must be done without any expectation of merit; recognition or reward and it should be offered with a deep sense of humility. If motivated by ego one cannot perform seva. It is a futile effort - mere wasting away of the precious God given gift of body and mind.⁵⁴

Jan seva places the Sikh service in the midst of *sangat* - a shared quest in the company of seekers where giving helps but doing counts!

INSTITUTIONALIZING OF SEVA IN SIKHISM BY GURUS

Sikh seva is a part of the devotee's spiritual quest - an expression of a Sikh's recognition that one can only offer seva to Akal Purakh in return for all that one receives through His benevolence. With its position as part of core beliefs institutionalization of seva practices is needed to encourage and facilitate motivation for seva to blend the belief gently with the way of life. This institutionalization started in the time of Guru Nanak himself.

There are several anecdotes about Nanak's personal inner compelling urge for helping the needy. As a young lad in his teens his father gave him some money to go out and conduct business. On returning home when asked about the business transacted and profit made, young Nanak said that having met a group of pious people who were hungry, he used up the money to feed them. The father was distraught and admonished him that one should make deals that are profitable. Nanak replied that this was indeed a real deal - *sacha sauda* - that will yield gain in the court of the Lord. The episode so often narrated to the young by the parents underscores in a simplistic

53. *ta ko karau sagal namaskar ja kai man pooran nirankar kar kirpa mohi thakur deva nanak udhrai jan ki seva* - Parbhathi M V, p. 1338.

54. *homai vich seva neh hovai tan man birtha jayee* - Vadhans M III, p. 560.

way the importance of seva in service of the virtuous. Unlike ritualistic feeding of Brahmins considered as daan that was decried by Guru Nanak feeding the hungry is - *parupkar* - altruism, a value highly commended.

In his later years Nanak settled down at a place that came to be known as Kartarpur, and set up a *dharamsal* where the devotees used to gather every evening to sing God's praises and share a community meal. The community grew and the *dharamsal*, over time, became the center where prayer and seva moved in tandem. Characteristic features of *dharamsal* from the beginning included providing shelter and food for the needy and wayfarers by the Guru and the congregation. This led to the institutions of community kitchen - *langar* - and providing living facilities - *serai* - for all who may come to become a part of the *dharamsals*.

Lives of all Gurus are a variegated saga of seva. The legend also has it that Gurus Angad, Amardas and Ramdas, the second, third and fourth in succession to Nanak all displayed exemplary qualities of seva, possibly a decisive factor in their elevation to Guruship. It is recorded for example that Amar Das used to rise early and hours before daybreak fetch water for Guru Angad to bathe. During the day he helped with cooking, serving, cleaning, and going out to the nearby forest to collect firewood. Guru Angad attended to the sick as a routine every morning. Guru Har Krishan, when just eight years old, contracted small pox tending to the sick in Delhi and died.

The Gurus also preached for the Sikhs to live a life of seva. Apart from multiple cites in the Granth, there are recordings of Gurus exhorting Sikhs to perform seva. To quote one, Bhai Mani Singh has recorded Guru Ram Das telling Bhai Puro to 'learn to serve others — for as you serve His men, so will He serve your souls.' Sikhs took to the ideal of seva with zeal and in various ways.

Over time to the institutions of community of believers - *sangat* - and *langar* was added the practice of all sitting together in rows - *pangat* - to partake of the food. This triad became

an instrument for 'fostering the spirit of equality, brotherhood and fraternization and in developing unrestricted commensalisms among its members.'⁵⁵

Establishing new communities started with Guru Nanak's development of Kartarpur. He also encouraged Guru Angad to continue his ministry from Khadur who in turn asked his successor Amardas to develop Goindwal. Guru Ramdas developed the present Amritsar and the tradition continued with later Gurus developing several new communities that have grown into thriving towns in time.

Water tanks and wells were traditionally made a part of new communities and Gurdwaras for benefit of the people. Guru Amardas got an open well constructed at Goindwal going down 84 steps – said to symbolize a tenth of million mythical incarnations each in wait for human incarnation. Guru Ramdas started the development at Amritsar around the tank in the midst of which the Golden Temple is located. Guru Arjan got constructed the tank at Taran Taran. The tradition caught on and tanks were added to several Gurdwaras over time.

The Gurus and early Sikhs also made tremendous sacrifices to secure the safety, security and freedoms of the people. The ultimate sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur to protect the right of Hindus to practise their religion is possibly the only one of its kind in religious history. Starting with Guru Hargobind the Gurus maintained a retinue of armed followers to protect the nascent community and others who sought their assistance from oppression by officials, raiders and foreign invaders.

Sikh seva also moved into hitherto uncharted territories, precursor of services that later came to be offered under the banner of Red Cross. There is this story of Bhai Kanhaiya going back to 1705 when the Mughal forces invested the Sikhs at Anand Pur frequently. After a day of skirmishes as the weary sun was going down in the lengthening shadows of a hot summer evening, old Kanhaiya could be seen ministering

55. Sunita Puri, *Advent of Sikhism*, Delhi, 1993, p. 129.

sips of water and tending the wounded of both sides. A similar scene could be envisioned when on another day the wounded lay in the midst of fallen leaves or fields wet with rain. The Sikhs upset, asked Guru Gobind Singh to stop Kanhaiya from comforting the enemy. The Guru said to call and ask him. Brought before the Guru, Kanahiya humbly said 'Satguru you pervade all; when I go tending the wounded and I look at them I see your image in each of them.' Such was the example that followers of Bhai Kanaihya known as *seva panthis* followed as they continued to offer *seva* in various places especially in disaster situations. They emphasized the moral tenet of *seva* and belief that a lover of God should imbibe God's attributes and serve all as God does without any distinction or favor.

Thus in addition to *seva* by individuals at personal level and of their own volition, Gurus gave impetus to collective *seva* by the community in supporting the *langar*, *serai* and for providing other projects and services for benefit of the people. Such initiatives included building new communities, constructing wells and ponds, and Gurdwaras became nodal points for organizing such activities.

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

Sikhs have always considered it *seva* to build Gurdwaras. It is significant that when Sikh misals got control over the Delhi Sultanate in late eighteenth century, motivation driving their campaign was to be able to construct Gurdwaras to commemorate visits by Gurus. That assured they gladly turned the control back to the decaying Mughal rulers.

Later the founding of Sikh rule gave a fillip to construction of some very impressive buildings and presentation of expensive and rare gifts to the Gurdwaras by the Princely families and the rich landed gentry. Drawing inspiration from the way the effort was organized by the Gurus in setting up new communities, building Dharamsals, water tanks and the like, an institutionalized feature of Sikh *seva* termed *karseva* developed. This is collective and voluntary effort put in by

the community in major construction, additions, alterations and maintenance works to the Gurdwaras or other heritage sites. *Kar seva* has had a thriving course as continued construction/renovation and expansion of Gurdwaras all over India [and Pakistan] would attest to.

The serai seva tradition also started at Kartarpur has abided and grown. If you visit any of the larger Gurdwaras during your travels you will find living facilities for visitors at all of them. Places like the Golden Temple at Amritsar have accommodation for thousands. Go there or to Bangla Sahib at Delhi and you would find people of all persuasions availing of this facility. Nankana Sahib and Panja Sahib now in Pakistan have accommodations for hundreds and adding. Room to stay can invariably be found at several Gurdwaras and web sites are being set up to have the information available readily and possibly even book it in advance in some places. I noticed a notification by the Gurdwara in Amsterdam that only those who have a valid visa for entry into Netherlands can use the serai facility.

Here again I may share an experience that Heidi Hadsell, President of Hartford Seminary, related to me. Quarter of a century or so earlier when Heidi had finished her graduate school she decided to go to East Africa for six months of her fieldwork. At that time, she says, there were hardly any moderately priced places to stay and she could not afford the expensive hotels. So she went round and sought suggestions on what to do. She was told to try the Gurdwaras and she did, ending up spending her six months in that part of the world living in the accommodations attached to nearby Gurdwaras.

Our more recent pleasant experience was at Kuala Lumpur earlier in 2006 when we were transiting on our way to Sydney. As we were moving from one terminal to another in their monorail coach, just as the doors were closing a person came running in and almost made it by the skin of his teeth. As he recollected his composure, he looked up at me and hesitatingly

said 'You, a Sikh —?' I said 'yes, you know some Sikhs?' He said yes - several years back when he was at Bombay for a few months for doing some courses, he did not have much money and ended up staying at the Gurdwara. He was Moriji Kawada, senior advisor with Japan Environmental Consultants, Tokyo.

Simple food freshly cooked and served in metal or leaf plates was the routine in langars. In smaller communities the clergy would even go round and collect cooked food donations every day from the neighboring parishioners to distribute in the Gurdwara. If land were available the Gurdwaras would grow vegetables and grain for use in the langar.

Langar seva has grown and it is typically served to visitors round the clock in major Gurdwaras. Many have shared this experience and I may relate here the comments of some who participated in the Parliament of World Religions at Barcelona in 2004 where the Sikhs had provided the langar seva for the full five-day duration of the Parliament. I recall a number of participants walking up to me in the lobbies of a major conference in Istanbul in October of that year to talk to me about their Barcelona experience and how they had enjoyed the langar so congenially offered by Sikhs to one and all.

There are some interesting opinions one hears about langar. Some Sikhs in the Diaspora are not quite happy with the hygienic conditions and have gone on to suggest that those performing langar seva should meet the relevant standards and norms for food service industry including use of gloves while handling and serving food. At another plane a Sikh sympathizer from Brazil has been making appeals on the Internet for Sikhs to offer langar as a beachhead for their missionary in the far off land. I in fact did suggest to her in an email that "I see what you are saying about langar having a possibility in Brazil but such projects need continuous support and I am not sure the talking members of [these forums] could be much direct help. These forums are best suited to test out some ideas and mostly see where the community is likely to respond negatively."

Yet another tradition developed was the setting up of *taksals*; institutions similar to seminaries some of which have made commendable contribution in the field of religious education and to help the poor or disabled. Mention may be made of Dodharpur Taksaal which was set up in the eighteenth century and has been training the visually handicapped in kirtan—possibly a unique egalitarian step for those days and during a very troubling period in Sikh history.

In late nineteenth century with the spread of education, Sikhs started establishing schools and colleges for education of men and women. There are a number of these in areas of Sikh concentration, generally named Khalsa schools/colleges; some attached to or built on Gurdwara lands. In the last 50 years Sikhs also set up, though rather belatedly, some competitive schools and professional colleges mostly in Punjab and Delhi; though the first Engineering College was established by the neglected Dakhni Sikh community at Bidar in Karnataka.

Some homes for the disabled and destitute, hospitals and other service facilities were also developed through Sikh philanthropy; several of these attached to Gurdwaras.

Sikhs continued to be inspired by the ideals of saint soldier and always plunged in to support the cause of freedom and justice without consideration of their sectarian gain or safety. Even in the run up to Indian struggle for freedom from the British rule, of the persons who were deported to life in prison or went to gallows, a good 80 to 90% were Sikhs. Gurdwara Reform Movement of the 1920's was the first totally non-violent movement against the British that succeeded though not without major loss of Sikh lives and limbs. Even during the abrogation of constitution and imposition of emergency by Indira Gandhi, only Sikhs continued with their protest *morchas* till the constitution was restored. The accounts of spontaneous support and seva of the troops in the 1965 and 1971 operations by the Sikhs stands out as a shining example of civilian contribution to war effort in the Indian military history.

Drawing inspiration from the teachings and exhortations

of the Gurus, several guidelines for the Sikh code of conduct were written after the passing of the tenth Guru. The current Sikh Code of Conduct & Conventions – *sikh rehat maryada* [SRM] – was promulgated in 1945 by the central Sikh Gurdwara management body - SGPC - and enjoins that a Sikh's personal life should comprehend:

- Meditation on *nam* and Sikh scriptures
- Live life per Guru's teachings
- Perform altruistic voluntary service⁵⁶

SRM emphasizes that *seva* is an important part of Sikh religious practice and encourages its illustrative models like sweeping floors, dusting shoes and serving in the langar to be organized, for imparting training, in the Gurdwaras.⁵⁷ It also reminds Sikhs that their life should be a life of benelovent exertion and that optimal results with minimal endeavor are achieved by collective effort. The code also enjoins on the Sikhs to pay *daswandh* to the Guru.

PROBLEMS & LIMITATIONS

As we have seen institutionalization of *seva* among Sikhs centered around the *dharamsal* which in the time of Gurus served not only as a place of worship but also as a vehicle for community building and channelising their altruism. All offerings and *daswandh* came to the Gurus who used the resources for altruistic purposes. Considering the state of societal development at the time, these practices were highly egalitarian and served the pressing needs of people without any distinction or discrimination. The traditions developed also integrated *seva* into the Sikh way of life.

Over the centuries Sikhs have continued to channel most of their offerings in the name of the Guru to the Gurdwaras. Experience however seems to suggest that the Gurdwara

56. Article III, Chapter III, SRM, SGPC Amritsar, July 1997.

57. Article XXI (1), SRM.

institution has not been able to deliver upon the promise of dharamsal underpinning the integrated concept of seva inherent in the Guru's teachings and praxis. Whereas the Gurus displayed deep sensitivity for continuing as well as emerging needs, in more recent times most of the funds have begun to be used up to pay those providing liturgical services and langar; with the bulk of capital expense being incurred for construction of ostentatious Gurdwaras to the neglect of emerging problems and needs. We will briefly look at these issues to grasp their import.

Professional *ragis* and *kathakars* do fulfill a need but more recently they seem to have become a strong vested interest and are constantly on the move offering their fare to the congregations globally. At another plane there is mushroom growth of *ashrams* and *deras* offering their version of Sikhi. Without going into the complexity of issues surrounding this development, it can be said that an increasing share of giving by the laity is going to support these activities.

The character of langar has also changed. Starting as a symbol of social equality, sharing and feeding the needy it seems to be becoming more of a signature Sikh practice. Shared mainly by the congregants it is acquiring the character of an elaborate fellowship meal in place of its egalitarian social and altruistic purpose. So even as its associated costs have soared, the seva impact has more likely declined. As a ritual extension of the worship service it also has been the subject of some controversy regarding food served and how it must be served. For example serving sandwiches or pizzas, instead of the traditional fare, is resisted. Likewise there is conflicted opinion on whether the food could be served at tables instead of squatting on the floor, as per the traditional practice.

The elaborate building structures do look good when new but generally suffer from lack of maintenance and in any case mostly the total décor may not go with the outward glitz and expensive building materials used. There is a shared apprehension that the *kar seva* Babas have failed to preserve the heritage

value in most of the reconstruction projects and unsubstantiated charges have also been made that funds collected for some projects have been diverted to benefit politicians. Some cases are said to be pending before the Sikh Judicial Commission.

Another comment that may reflect on the practice of in kind offerings is that even though a considerable part of contribution by the devotees is made in kind there seems indeed to be a paucity of expensive presents made to the Gurdwaras. Most of Gurdwaras, historical ones included, have hardly any great collection of artefacts compared to their equivalents in other faith traditions.

Some of these issues could be traced to structural problems. Committees elected by the congregants – generally for a short term of one year, now manage most Gurdwaras. Apart from introducing several distortions and unhealthy practices associated with the electoral process, the Committees tend to be focused on the short term and invariably try to maintain their stranglehold in leadership roles by encouraging an inward looking outlook where the three activities – liturgical services, langar and building projects - come together in a shared nexus at the cost of projects that answer to the contemporary seva needs.

The net result is that while Sikh giving through the Gurdwaras would seem to have lost its anchor in the values so passionately advocated by the Gurus, the religious leadership and the community does not seem to have felt the need to articulate a vision of seva to relate to the changing societal needs. This impression is also supported by the fact that, notwithstanding listing seva as one of the three most important facets of a Sikh's life, the SRM offers only a very scanty coverage limited to a few cryptic sentences. The apathetic absence of any scholarly work on the subject is no less glaring.

GURDWARAS & CONTEMPORARY SEVA NEEDS

Our discussion so far throws up two thoughts. Firstly that Gurdwara centered seva while it continues to be a great source

for maintaining seva as an important constituent of Sikh worship and also provides training ground in volunteerism; some features of seva at the Gurdwaras need revisiting. The other thought is that the structure of Gurdwaras does not seem to allow several of the emerging needs to be served because of constraints that have come to paralyze their institutional frame.

REVISITING SEVA

We have seen some examples of problems and limitations of seva as practiced today. In fact there are other areas where an increasing divide is witnessed because of restricting seva activities based on gender or observance in the name of tradition and the restrictive approach of allowing only some seva activities like langar, Sunday school or medical aid under the Gurdwara aegis. We have seen earlier that the concept of seva as in gurbani is not constrained by such considerations. Let us try and explore what the SRM is saying in those few sentences that are devoted to the subject.

Article XXI of the SRM says that simple forms of seva are:

- Sweeping floors of the Gurdwara,
- Serving water to or fanning the congregation,
- Offering provisions to and rendering any kind of service in the langar,
- Dusting the shoes of the people visiting the Gurdwara, etc.

The SRM also reminds Sikhs that 'the concept of service is not confined to fanning the congregation, service to and in the Guru ka Langar etc. A Sikh's entire life is a life of benevolent exertion. The most fruitful service is the service that secures the optimum good by minimal endeavour. That can be achieved through organised collective action. A Sikh has, for this reason, to fulfil his/her Panthic obligations, even as he/she performs his/her individual duties' [Article XXIII]. The code also enjoins on the Khalsā Sikhs to pay daswandh to the Guru [Article XXIV, p].

Clearly seva is not constrained within any specific bounds and its simple forms including caring for congregation's comfort, offerings and seva in the langar and various sweeping and cleaning jobs in the Gurdwara do not add up to the sum total of Sikh seva. These examples if at all reflect the common denominator of seva practices in all Gurdwaras and thus serve as easily understood illustrations.

The call to contribute *daswandh* to the Guru and for collective effort to achieve optimum good with minimum endeavor points to other seva projects undertaken by the Gurdwara. That seva is Panthic obligation. It is intended to be effective and has to aim at and realize results. It must contribute to amelioration of human condition and have clear markers to assess its effects.

Thus viewed seva as popularly understood and practiced in Gurdwaras is not what it is intended to be either in terms of *gurbani* or its more pragmatic temporal application as enunciated in the SRM. What we witness in the Gurdwaras is ritualistic replication that has little merit spiritually and does little to serve the needy.

EMERGING NEEDS

There are several needs and problems in various societies that call for collective effort by the community. These include helping the poor and needy; disaster relief; education and research; advocacy, discrimination issues, media relations; promoting art and culture and developing relations with the mainstream society. While we will look at some broadening trends in Sikh seva a bit later we first want to look at a few examples from the Diaspora that tend to be particularly stressful for families in these environments but which by and large have not received any active support or even attention from the Gurdwaras:

- Marital maladjustments, divorces, single parenting
- Dysfunctional families, domestic violence, extended family tensions
- Youth alienation, teen suicides

- Loneliness, isolation, absence of support system
- Cultural inhibitions

The specific cases that I am citing are mostly gathered through my various conversations on the Internet. Karam Singh, UK wrote about an incident in August 2005 where a young pregnant Sikh mother Manjit Kaur Sidhu with another child in tow flung herself in front of a fast intercity express train at Southall station. She and the children died instantly. On 21st February 2006 her mother Satwant Kaur Sidhu committed suicide from the same spot on the platform in the same manner as her daughter.

The mother was a divorcee and her daughter had endured taunts from other Sikh girls in her teens about her mothers divorce. The mother had hoped that her daughter's arranged marriage would not go sour. Unfortunately the union did not succeed. The mother left a suicide note blaming herself for the failed marriage and unhappiness of her daughter and the deaths of the daughter and grand children.

As the mental health of grief-stricken mother deteriorated she did go through a spell of psychiatric care. The neighbors tried to help. Taken to the clergy at the Gurdwara she was advised to do Naam Simran. The community did not have any other resources to help and the clergy had no experience or skills to counsel or help deal with bereavement.

Harkinder Singh Chahal, Canada who has extensive experience of dealing with the youth brought out that there have been cases of Sikh teen suicides in Greater Toronto area due to emotional pressures of keeping hair and problems at schools. His surmise is that we are impelled by the desire to transplant life styles that we left behind and expect that our kids will be molded into persons that we envision forgetting the influences that the environment has on our life styles. He regrets that we have not even looked at how programs of Gora Sikhs at Guru Ram Das Ashram creatively involve all congregants irrespective of age and ability in their services

that helps them deal with isolation, doubt and alienation.

There are destitute Sikhs in Western societies who fall between the statutory safeguards like many of the other homeless people. There also are Sikh drug addicts, alcoholics and even some women who live rough on the streets. In an exchange Harmander Singh, UK, brought out that Dr Kanwar Ranvir Singh and others tried a few years back to map out availability of support services to Sikh junkies in London but probably found that very little was being provided by the community itself. A rehabilitation program run by young Sikhs in West London, Sikh Helpline, was in dire need of funds and donation of foodstuff by Gurdwaras was only evident in a small number of cases - one case that he knew of was Guru Nanak Satsang Sabha [Karmsar] UK based in Ilford - a Sant run Gurdwara.

Cases are also known where families threw out an elderly dependant. A case from Malton Singh Sabha Gurdwara in Ontario, Canada was reported where an old man turned out by his daughter in law came seeking shelter for the night at the Gurdwara but was refused because the caretaker did not have authority to accommodate walk-ins. Permission to stay at the Gurdwara is granted only by the Management Committee by prior booking making it difficult for an itinerant visitor or a needy person to get shelter even for a night or two. The attitude towards drifters and the fallen is much worse. Most Gurdwaras do not offer any assistance in such cases and in fact the subject hardly is discussed.

Indian Consulates are known to direct needy visiting Indian nationals to seek help from Gurdwaras. There also are cases where some cab drivers bring or suggest to a person to go to a Gurdwara if they have no place to stay. The need in most cases is for food and shelter though there are cases where medical care, legal help or assistance with last rites may be needed. Problems of undocumented persons are much worse and there are legal difficulties in offering help to them. A frequently noticed problem faced by the Granthies, Ragis,

visiting Sikhs and the uninsured in the sangat is medical aid.

New immigrants to these countries have to go through some pretty trying times initially. Family and friends do generally provide support but the Gurdwaras or the community has no organized programs to help or guide them through this phase. All other faith and ethnic groups have institutionalized support for new immigrants mainly as an extension of their Church activities. The support offered may include connecting with others in the community, language classes to learn English, easy loans for initial set up, help preparing for Citizenship tests and the like.

Children in schools have a lot of problems. There is pervasive lack of awareness about Sikhs and textbooks provide little information. The children often face racial innuendos and suffer discrimination in various forms – mainly surrounding kes, turbans, kirpan and arranged marriages. At college levels there is some infusion of Sikh students from other countries, mostly India, but the sense of isolation does not diminish. There are no Sikh Chaplains or mentors and therefore even though some campuses have SSA's but mostly they are inactive because of scant numbers and lack of community involvement. Many of the college students live on shoestring budgets and have nowhere within the community to turn to for financial help.

We must recognize that some of these problems are for the reason of being a Sikh and as such it would be prudent to offer counseling support through or under advice by the Gurdwaras so that the subject is handled with empathy and sensitivity. Counselling may also help to better cope with trauma caused by domestic violence, protracted sickness and bereavement but new arrivals are reluctant to ask for such help due to cultural inhibitions. Difficulties such as this strongly suggest that our Gurdwaras should be enabled to be of help in addressing mundane needs of the community.

Given our developmental stage as communities in the Diaspora we have perforce to have some additional expectations from Gurdwaras - the same way as all migrant communities

had in their early settlement periods when churches undertook several roles. With us this is not easily accepted and throws up an issue confronting several sangats in the Diaspora. I am familiar with situations where even the mention of something like counselling center would raise heckles of an articulate and aggressive segment of the sangat making slim the chance of any such initiative to survive.

With the very different local situations that may exist in various places it may be prudent for us to start with a group of volunteers and aim at small baby steps. Even for such small initiatives to come about we may find that some assistance from the Gurdwaras is needed because of their centrality to our corporate community life. In fact at the local level there is hardly any means except through the Gurdwara to seek community support and to keep them informed of the progress and problems.

In the long run our solution may be to design constitutional and administrative structures for Gurdwaras so that the management committees cannot restrict or restrain community development activities based on their whims and fancies - all this in a manner that does not compromise the sanctity of the sacred space. If we look around plenty of models are available of such composite institutions in other faith groups. One limiting factor is that in Churches, Synagogues and even Mosques the Pastor, Rabi or Imam have a lot more say than our poor Bhai Sahib. They also have more qualified clergy and possibly more informed and disciplined congregants.

After my experience with emotional giving for new Gurdwaras with out looking at their purported constitution and overall plans in addition to congregational worship, I decided to not make any further contributions without first understanding how the funds may get used. Taking such position is painful and I even feel that my approach may not pass the test of nishkam seva but I felt that given our individual inability to influence change, if some more were to use similar tests before yielding their wallets, perhaps the managements

would become more receptive to accommodate some of much needed changes.

BROADENING TRENDS

Over the last few years a growing number of Sikh volunteer organizations have come up and some of these have been very active in bringing relief and succour to the victims of man made and natural disasters. SGPC and Sikh volunteer groups have been very active in the aftermath of Gujrat earthquake in bringing relief supplies, setting up community kitchens, medical aid, transportation services and so on. Likewise after the Tsunami Sikh volunteer groups have been providing relief in Tamilnadu as well as in Indonesia. They have also been active in relief work in New Orleans post Katrina and in Pakistan after the recent earthquake. A Sikh volunteer working with Christians for Peace, Harmeet Singh Soodan was among the recent hostages taken in Iraq, fortunately released after a longish period.

Sikh seva is in the process of diversifying both in India and in the Diaspora - a welcome response to the emerging societal needs as also the needs of the community in the post Sep 11 setting in Western countries. Several NGOs are also coming up though most of them, given the dynamics of intra-community communication in Sikhs, end up seeking support of Gurdwaras to make their pitch to raise funds and to generate some level of community interest and support. These entities offer services falling into the following broad categories:

- Education, healthcare, care of the mentally ill, aged, poor and the orphans
- Awareness, outreach and advocacy in respective societies
- Legal protection and rights violation
- Relief in disaster situations
- Aid and relief to those in Punjab/India
- Meeting the religious, social and cultural needs of the community

We are presenting brief notes on some of the organizations

attempting delivery of such services as Appendices following this article. Appendix I documents the work of selected organizations in India and the Diaspora mostly drawing upon the information at their web sites, published literature and news reports. Appendix II is a caselet depicting the work of a Gurdwara based medical center and public school in a relatively affluent South Delhi neighborhood.

COMPETING PRIORITIES: A RECENT CONTROVERSY

An offering of gold palanquin [Palki] to the Gurdwara Janam Asthan at Nanakana Sahib by DSGMC in 2005 generated a lot of internal Sikh reflection and also attracted wide media attention. The internal debate primarily was about propriety of expensive gifts when so many deserving causes were not served for lack of resources. As the subject raised issues of prudence of choice and competing priorities vs compelling desire or devotion and played out in the public domain with all its political overtones exposed, we would look at it in some detail to comprehend some dynamics peculiar to the situation.

If we look closely at the Palki incident it attracted attention, less because of the nature of offering than the manner of its delivery. The plan to carry the Palki at the head of a motor procession from Delhi to Nankana Sahib across the International border accompanied by Chief Minister of Punjab obviously had political overtones and was intended to garner media attention that it did. In a way it also subserved the objective of promoting people to people contacts between India and Pakistan that both countries wanted to encourage.

There was expectedly a sense of outrage expressed by some at the propriety of such a gift from the angle of Sikh thought. Dharmic Ekta Mission, a Sikh group known for its work among children, advocated strongly against the move and also conducted an opinion poll asking if Golden Palki is appropriate and if Gurdwara funds should be spent on Medical Aid to Poor and Education or Marble and Gold.

Even though Sikhs willingly contribute to help the needy

it is difficult to conclude that all Sikh giving is altruistic or guided by cost benefit approach. It would be relevant to recall that Sikhs addressed their Gurus as - *sacha patshah* - the true king and treated them as such. They made them the offerings of the best they could. That attitude has been abiding and recently Sikhs did not think much of spending between 150,000 to 200,000 dollars on a chartered plane to ferry copies of Sri Guru Granth Sahib from Amritsar to Toronto. The reverential and altruistic at best seem to move in parallel tracks with the former possibly having an edge. In a way then the Palki was a symbolic manifestation of some of inherent motivations driving Sikh giving.

Sikhs believe that one cannot give anything to the Guru for indeed all that one has comes from him. No price can be placed on love and devotion because loving devotion is what is pleasing to God.⁵⁸ The Guru knows a devotee's inner state of mind and the devotion, love, seva and commitment that went into an offering. If expression of adoring devotion translates into a beautiful embellishment for the Guru, so be it.

The Sikh thought is extremely respectful of the Guru and as we have seen earlier Sikhs are enjoined to be in seva of the Guru. Gurbani also says, 'the humble one who worships, adores and serves the Guru is pleasing to my *Har*. To worship and adore the True Guru is to serve *Har*. In His Mercy, *Har* saves us and carries us across — offer the Guru sacred foods, clothes, silk and satin robes of all sorts; know that he is true - its merits shall never leave you lacking. The divine true Guru is embodiment and image of the *Har*; he utters the ambrosial word. O Nanak, blessed is the destiny of that humble being who focuses his consciousness on the feet of God.'⁵⁹

58. *prem bhagat prabh man pateaaaeiaa* - Dhanaasree M I, p. 686.

59. *jo gur ko jan pooje seve so jan mere har parabh bhaavai. har ki seva satgur pooja kar kirpa aap taraavai — tis gur ko chhaadan bhojan paat patambar baho bidh sat kar mukh sanchahu tis punn kee fir tot na aavai. satgur deo partakh har moorat jo amrit bachan sunaavai. naanak bhaag bhalay tis jan kay jo har charnee chit laavai* - Malar M IV, p.1264.

It would thus seem that making expensive offerings to the Guru is not unacceptable. That it has been true in praxis is illustrated by an anecdote related by Harkinder Singh Chahal. He says that when he visited Multan in 1979, Surryiaa Multani's sister who hosted them talked of her growing up in a house near Gurdwara Panja Sahib when as kids they used to climb up walls of the Gurdwara to see Vaisakhi festivities. On one occasion she heard an appeal made for donations and saw many women taking off their jewellery and putting it in the collection box. She could only wonder at the Sikh passion to give Zakaat!

Another question that may be relevant is if we should think of an offering like the golden palki merely as an expensive extravaganza or we should also explore such offerings may have the potential value to enhance the aesthetics of symbolism in the Gurdwara that may continue to inspire spiritual expression? Our effort is to try and make the Gurdwaras look pleasing - then what is the balance between aesthetic and austere [understandably austere may have its own aesthetic value] in Sikh worship? Does aesthetics of environment in the Gurdwara enhance sense of equipoise and devotion? Do the beauty, rarity or grandeur of artifacts bring a spirituality inspiring increment to the Gurdwaras? In other words if there is some way that such things help in our spiritual elevation, even in a transitory manner, we may find that offerings like the golden palki possibly have a collateral inspirational value for the lay believer.

I asked my wife the question if the visibly glittering and aesthetically inspiring at Darbar Sahib touches the spiritual in us. Her response was that to her the spiritually inspiring ambience of Darbar Sahib was the all-pervading sound of kirtan gently wafting across the expanse of water - the divine association with spiritual music and water. This is another powerful recognition of aesthetics.

Notwithstanding all this Sikh experience does not reflect overflow of presents like the Palki or other expensive offerings. If at all Gurdwaras, historical ones included, do not have any

great collection of artifacts nor do they have any corpus worth the name compared to their equivalents in other faith traditions. This will be borne out if an inventory of possessions and their valuation is attempted. My sense is that a significant part of Sikh offering consists of small items that serve little functional purpose, do not add to the assets or have a lasting value.

An example is the ritual presentation of fairly expensive sets of intricately embroidered silken sheets known as 'romalla' used for ceremonial wrapping of Guru Granth Sahib. These are an expression of reverence by the devotee and Sikhs buy the best they can afford. Romallas offered, for example at Darbar Sahib can hardly be used there, because of the tradition of using sets that must be crafted to certain specifications, and may at best be being sent to other Gurdwaras or even discarded. Seeing the numbers offered one may in fact wonder that if SGPC were to set up a Romalla Fund to which the devotees could deposit the cost of their proposed offering, they could perhaps buy a Palki equivalent every few months and in time create a rich heritage of artifacts.

Thus the strong Sikh tradition of giving in kind is akin to drops of different extracts that cannot come together to form a stream. Streams abide. Drops don't. So if people choose to make ritualistic offerings with no altruistic purpose, let it be contribution to an abiding symbol of devotion - a Palki rather than a thousand romallas that perhaps never get used for the purpose for which their offering was made.

In retrospect it seems however that the episode did show up a failing or at least a lack of forethought about the purported use of the Palki. The intention of the donors was for the Golden Palki to replace the existing Palki in the Gurdwara. As it turned out this was not acceptable to the community because it would have meant breaking down the existing marble structure going back to the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Early in 2006 when we visited Nankana Sahib we found that this Palki was parked in a covered extension to the sanctum sanctorum encased in a secure glass shell. The visitors, mostly Muslims, were

attracted to see the expensive offering and were obviously impressed but the Pakistani Sikhs seemed to be struggling to decide what to do with it that would be in keeping with its purpose and also ensure security of such a high value item.

From a political perspective, this event could in time prove of significance because it did raise the profile of DSGMC and PSGPC within the Sikh world. This could force the pace for decentralization in the way Sikh institutions are managed globally and help catalyze changes in SGPC.

TO CONCLUDE

The most vivid display of Sikh seva is no doubt evident in Gurdwaras. With the words *sat nam waheguru* on their lips Sikhs vie for the opportunity to be able to do some seva. There is never a dearth of volunteers howsoever mean, hard or risky the task may be. It is inspiring to see small children, mere toddlers, distributing napkins or spoons in the langar. Evidently the inculcation of seva as a Sikh value is a continuing priority for the believers.

The anchorage of the precept in Sikh scriptural thought and its praxis in Gurdwara has blended seva into Sikh values and way of life. It also has helped seva to retain its moral and ethical moorings as a humble offering by the devotee to the Divine in harmony with God's benevolent dispensation. Being a spiritual quest for a Sikh seva should generate a sense of contentment and humility. It should also best be *nehkami*. There is no need to despair though if that does not happen because the Gurus also likened action choices to *vanaj*, transactions with their respective tangible or intangible returns.

We must also look closely at what we are doing in the name of seva - not to criticize but with a view to make it more responsive to so many diverse needs of the community that are languishing because of inadequate support. It is also important to remember that seva is extended to all in need and is not confined on sectarian basis. We do have a lot to do to strengthen our intra and inter community outreach in all

spheres, be they religious, social, cultural, educational etal. The more our initiatives diversify, the more purpose and substance will we bring to our seva and hopefully this extended outreach will continue to fulfill its promise and purpose as envisioned by the Gurus. So even as progressively Sikh giving extends beyond Gurdwaras we must start using the seva potential that is so readily available at Gurdwaras for wider altruistic purposes. That could be a constructive step in the evolution espoused by so many of us.

As Sikh seva is growing and progressively broadening the givers should weigh up how their contribution is likely to be used and make choices that fit their sense of giving; be it for Gurughar, food, shelter, tending to the sick, disaster relief, education, computers or hundreds of other causes in need of support. Gurbani gives us an inspiring precept of seva so well exemplified in the life of Gurus. Let us bring our praxis in closer alignment to the Guru's teachings. Let us do it effectively. Let us also do it in a spirit of harmony and prayer for ultimately seva is but another name for prayer.

Appendix 1

SEVA IN PRACTICE A BRIEF ON ACTIVITIES BY SOME SIKH VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

Let us now look at a sampling of Sikh seva organizations both in India and the Diaspora. Our selection has been guided by the ease of availability of information and as such it cannot be claimed that the sample represents the cross section of Sikh seva in practice. At the same time our judgement is that the sample may point to the major areas of Sikh seva engagement and trends in its diversification.

The examples we are looking at include both Gurdwara based initiatives and independent organizations. Our limited sample seems to suggest that an influencing factor in growing Sikh seva is the increasing awareness as well as prosperity among Sikhs in a fast growing Indian economy and the upward trend of contributions from a maturing Diaspora. The 1984 pogrom against Sikhs in Delhi and September 11, 2001 incidents triggered creation of activist seva organizations in response to specific Sikh needs that emerged at the time.

The trend of Diaspora philanthropy efforts in Punjab that started in early 80s have been studied and per a ground level survey of 477 villages in Doaba region, of Rs 200 crore contribution received from Diaspora donors upto 2002, 96% was for religious places.

About 28 villages were selected at random for resurvey in 2007 to compare any shift in trends in philanthropy by the

Diaspora donors. Three noticeable changes were:

- While over Rs 14.12 crore were received by these 28 villages for development in around two decades before 2002, in the following five years their contributions have been pegged over Rs 11.53 crore – a significant increase even if exchange rate variation were to be factored in.
- The share for religious places declined to 75% with increases in education and health related projects.
- Effort is more organized through increasingly involving development committees or the village panchayats in managing the projects.

The survey also found that the donors were mainly inspired in their giving by the concept of Dasvandh and the value system propounded and emphasized by the Sikh Gurus. The Diaspora donors seem mainly interested in supporting Gurdwara activities and renovation projects at Gurdwaras.

DSGMC

The DSGMC maintains all the historical Gurdwaras and seven Singh Sabha Gurdwaras in Delhi. DSGMC was created under a separate legislation in 1971 and in that respect it is an autonomous organization with responsibilities regarding management of Gurdwaras and other Sikh institutions under its aegis similar to those of the SGPC. One difference that must be recognized is that Gurdwara Akal Takhat is managed by and its Jathedar appointed by the SGPC. The Sikh institution of Akal Takhat is symbolic of sovereignty of Sikh Panth. By tradition and continuing practice therefore the Akal Takhat Jathedar has come to enjoy the informal position of the supreme Sikh religious leader. The SGPC therefore is in practice more than a committee managing Gurdwaras under its jurisdiction and exercises an umbrella role over Sikh religious affairs. DSGMC has a role limited to managing the Gurdwaras in their control and Sikh institutions set up by DSGMC using resources generated

through their efforts.

Apart from managing the Gurdwaras the DSGMC manages and supports the following educational institutions, several of which have been established at the initiative of and through the efforts of the DSGMC:

- Four Colleges up to post graduate level affiliated to Delhi University,
- An Institute of Management
- One Engineering College
- An institute of industrial training,
- One Polytechnic
- One vocational college
- Guru Harkrishan Public Schools -- a chain of ten private schools for providing quality education up to Senior Secondary level
- Many other Schools in various localities of Delhi
- All Khalsa Schools, in Delhi that have their own managements by giving them grants.

DSGMC publishes a monthly Punjabi Magzaine "SIS GANJ", has set up and maintains Baba Baghel Singh Museum and a Library at Gurdwara Bangla Sahib. The Committee has also been organizing welfare and help in the event of natural and other calamities and providing continuing financial and other assistance to the Widows of Sikhs killed during the 1984 pogrom.

DSGMC was also in the vanguard of presentation of the golden palki to Gurdwara Janam Asthan at Nanakana Sahib, discussed earlier in some detail.

Pingalwara

Pingalwara now registered as All India Pingalwara Charitable Society was founded in year 1924 by then 19-year-old Ramji Das who later came to be known as Bhagat Puran Singh. Possibly the most well-known and respected Sikh charity, Pingalwara raises poor and abandoned children and helps them re-establish in society at completion of their school education. It operates

a house for destitutes and has facilities for 1080 patients in Amritsar. It also operates a free dispensary, a blood bank, a shelter for mentally retarded children and a free primary school in Amritsar city. It has an ambulance and a basic surgical facility to care for accident victims. Pingalwara donates all unclaimed bodies to Government Medical College, Amritsar for research and teaching purposes.

It has also opened a branch at Manawala comprising a Secondary School, SOS homes, home for mentally ill and the aged and a Physiotherapy centre. In 2006 it also established a 35-acre organic farm 20 km from Amritsar for growing fresh fruits and vegetables.

Bhagat Puran Singh, who was nominated for Nobel Peace Prize in 1991, had enunciated the following guidelines that continue to inspire Pingalwara approach:

- Every sick person who is physically unfit to earn his livelihood has a divine right to be looked after by men and organisations engaged in social service and charity.
- A large number of poor, helpless and sick people cannot be treated as inpatients in hospitals. Therefore we need institutions that look after patients and take them for treatment to various hospitals in the city.
- Most of the poor patients who may succeed in getting their ailment diagnosed are unable to purchase the required medicines.
- Hospitals do not admit destitute persons with incurable diseases and they are left to die a slow and painful death.
- Care of patients suffering from mental diseases puts tremendous strain on their families. Recovery time from these illnesses can be very long and many poor families cannot afford it. Women mental patients are also vulnerable to sexual exploitation and becoming carriers of sexually transmitted diseases. There is acute shortage of beds in Mental Hospitals - 22,000 beds available against the estimated countrywide need of 5 million.

The Director of Pingalwara, Dr Inderjit Kaur was among the honorees awarded Padma Bhushan on the Republic Day, 2008.

Kalgidhar Society

The Kalgidhar Society strives to accomplish the vision of Sant Attar Singh, who in the 1920's, envisaged an educational institution in the Himalayas from where young children equipped with a blend of modern scientific education and spiritual learning would spread the message of peace and universal brotherhood. The process of fulfilling this dream was initiated in 1956 when his Harvard educated disciple Sant Teja Singh set up a spiritual centre in the remote village of Baru, in the Himalayas and formed The Kalgidhar Society. Thirty years later the first Akal Academy was established at the same place with just 5 pupils. **The Society now has established and manages:**

- 22 English medium co-educational institutions with 20,000 students and
- Akal Child Welfare Foundation that provides shelter to more than 800 orphans.
- Spiritual Academy for girls at Baru Sahib and for boys at Cheema in Punjab for spiritual & vocational training in music and other fields for students from weaker sections.
- Akal Home for the Elderly providing shelter to more than 200 seniors.
- Home for Widows and Destitute Women imparting vocational training to more than 200 women in various fields to make them self-dependant.
- Periodical summer camps for the youth.
- Akal Rural Upliftment program designed to generate employment for the remote, backward and far-flung hilly areas of Himachal Pradesh.
- Save Environment Program promoting use of non-conventional sources of energy like solar energy and biogas plants.

- 100-bed **Charitable Hospital** catering to the health needs of underprivileged and deprived rural masses of remote & backward areas of Himachal Pradesh.
- De-addiction Centers at village Cheema in Punjab and Baru Sahib in Himachal Pradesh

To provide relief assistance for the earthquake victims in Kashmir the Society adopted 15 villages and helped reconstruct houses, schools, Muslim mosques, Hindu temples and Sikh Gurdwaras.

The Society spent \$ 2,797,208 on Education, \$ 684,146 on Healthcare, \$ 1,348,871 on Social Welfare and \$ 434,782 on Rehabilitation making a **total of over \$ 5.25 million for the year.**

Nishkam Sikh Welfare Council, New Delhi

Over the years Nishkam has grown into well-organized delivery organization for Sikh seva. It has expanded its activities and diversified into providing administrative support role to some seva initiatives from the Diaspora Sikhs. Services presently being provided by Nishkam include:

- **Stitching-cum-Training Centre:** started in 1985 to provide gainful employment to 700 women who became widows in the Delhi pogrom against Sikhs in 1984. Since then it has continued to provide employment to widows and needy women. The products of the Centre are sold through Gurdwara stalls. A stitching and embroidery training centre has also been added for young girls.
- **Tuition Centre:** started in 1985, it now has about 400 children from I to class XII attending special tuition sessions by paying a very nominal fee. The three-hour classes are held in the mornings and evenings.
- **Charitable Type and Shorthand Centre:** started in 1988 aims at training children in typing in English, Hindi & Punjabi both on typewriters and computers. It also is

offering training in English shorthand. The Centre is helpful to our students of Adult Education Program also as typing and shorthand are subjects in the Open School Scheme.

- **Computer Centre:** started in June, 1992 aims at providing computer training to children in different courses. Fee concession is offered to needy children.
- **Nishkam Medical Centre:** started in 1993 provides morning and evening O.P.D. service. It also has arrangements for free laboratory and imaging services. Special emphasis in the Polyclinic is on Dental and Cataract surgeries. Nishkam proposes to launch a free group insurance scheme to cover needy widows, senior citizens and orphan children, a drug de-addiction center, ambulance service and hearse van service.
- **Gurmat Sangeet Vidyala:** the children learn kirtan and also are prepared for the Diploma/Graduation course in Music from Pryag Sangeet Samiti, Allahabad that enables them to become music teachers.
- **Adult Education Program:** to coach school drop outs to successfully complete the Xth/XIIth class examination under the Open School Scheme and help widows to get promotion to clerical grades.
- **English Speaking Classes:** to help achieve fluency in English and for personality development preparatory for interviews, these classes are attended on an average by about 50 children and are becoming more popular.
- **Library:** a large number of text books, books on computers, children's books and books on Sikh religion and history are available in the library

Nishkam also has been the partner to administer the scholarship schemes in India for Sikh Human Development foundation, Washington, DC and the Relief Committee of Greater New York. They follow a well-structured process briefly outlined as follows:

- Advertise the scholarships in Indian media;
- Collect information on all candidates, administer the tests and score results;
- Interview selected candidates;
- Report back to the donor organization on the candidates that match the required criteria and
- Disburse scholarships to the student or the educational institution once the funds are received.

International Institute for Gurmat Studies

It was founded in Lucknow, India in 1955. At the time it was known as "*The Young Sikh Missionaries*". In 1972, it expanded its vision and charter and renamed itself as "Institute of Gurmat Studies". Its offices were moved to New Delhi and membership that had been restricted to young men was opened to the young Sikh women as well. In 1979, IGS went International by holding its first camp outside India in Kathmandu, Nepal. Since January 1985, it has been headquartered in California, USA.

By spreading the teachings of the Gurus as enshrined in Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Sikh scriptural literature, the institute strives for development of an educationally progressive, spiritually awakened, socially Gurmat oriented and politically united Khalsa panth.

IGS has used the following five methods to convey the message of the Gurus to the Sikh Community, particularly to the younger Sikh generation:

- Residential Sikh Youth Camps of one to three weeks, Mothers/Family Camps of one to three days and Mini Day Camps
- Shabad Kirtans with women mostly leading their Kirtan Jathas.
- Talks in English, Punjabi and Hindi.
- IGS Monthly Magazine - The Sikh Portrait
- Bi-weekly Diwans/ Gurpurab Celebrations

Since its first Sikh Youth Camp in India, in October 1972,

IGS has held 65 Sikh Youth Camps, 10 Sikh Family Camps and 3 Mini Camps in different parts of the world. IGS pioneered the Sikh Youth Camping Movement at the International level and is also the first Sikh organization to hold mixed sex camps. IGS introduced - *Kesh Darshan* - a 'hair shampoo and show' contest in 1980, since made mandatory for all those participating in their camps.

IGS has developed and released a Gurbani Researcher CD to facilitate explore, search, research and understand Gurbani and to access its English translation. IGS is digitizing the remaining Sikh scriptural literature and early Sikh writings with Punjabi University, Patiala authenticating the texts before being digitized.

In the interest of preservation of important manuscripts lying with various universities, Gurdwaras and individuals, IGS has recently microfilmed about 100 manuscripts held by Takhat Sri Harimandar Sahib Patna, Punjabi University Patiala, Dr. Balbir Singh Sahitya Kendra Dehradun, DAV College Chandigarh and some individuals. More such work is planned.

Ensaaf & Carnage 84

These two initiatives are in pursuit of justice for mass crimes against Sikhs in Punjab and Delhi during the 1980's. Ensaaf based in the USA has been pursuing the cases pertaining to Punjab. Carnage 84 is the name of website that gives information about the continuing massive efforts to seek justice for families of the victims of the pogrom against Sikhs in Delhi post murder of Indira Gandhi. Both these initiatives have persevered with studious and detailed efforts at legal representations in cases that have been denied justice for over 20 years and visits to their websites would be instructive for those interested in issues of denial of justice in human rights abuse cases.

For our purposes we are limiting to introduce our readers to their voluntary effort and as an example of the nature of their endeavor are giving some details about the activities of Ensaaf.

Ensaaf works to end impunity and achieve justice for mass state crimes in Punjab, India by documenting and exposing human rights violations, bringing perpetrators to justice, and organizing survivors to advocate for their rights.

Ensaaf believes that impunity i.e. the institutional refusal to hold perpetrators of human rights abuse accountable, is the root cause of ongoing abuses and perpetually violates survivors' rights to truth, justice, and reparations. Ensaaf's programs work together to create a comprehensive approach to end impunity and achieve justice for mass state crimes in Punjab by:

- Working with survivors to give presentations and organize events at community centers throughout the US.
- Objectively documenting human rights violations to build evidence for accountability, publishing reports, and educating the public.
- Pursuing precedent-setting litigation to hold perpetrators accountable, such as the cases of human rights defenders Jaswant Singh Khaira and Sukhwinder Singh Bhatti.
- Bringing critical human rights issues to the attention of the United Nations and its members.

Ensaaf and Human Rights Watch jointly have produced a report, "Protecting the Killers: A Policy of Impunity in Punjab, India" released in November 2007. The report together with a photo essay and video testimonials, examines the challenges faced by victims and their relatives in pursuing legal avenues for accountability for the human rights abuses perpetrated by security forces and describes the near total failure of India's judicial and state institutions to provide justice for victims' families. The report concludes that in order to end the institutional defects that foster impunity in Punjab and elsewhere in the country, the government should take steps, including the establishment of a commission of inquiry, a special prosecutor's office, and an extensive reparations program.

Other reports, communications and briefs prepared by Ensaaf include:

- The Punjab Mass Cremations Case: India Burning the Rule of Law (January 2007)
- Punjab Police: Fabricating Terrorism Through Illegal Detention and Torture (June 2005 to August 2005)
- Twenty Years of Impunity: The November 1984 Pogroms of Sikhs in India
- Submission to UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (Ensaaf, REDRESS, CHRGI) (November 2007)
- International Legal Arguments: High Court Petition to Investigate and Prosecute Gill for Murder of Khalra (September 2006)
- Communication to Special Representative on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders (Disappearance of Human Rights Attorney Sukhwinder Singh Bhatti) (May 2006)
- Joint Letter to Director, Central Bureau of Investigation, calling for prosecution of KPS Gill for murder of Jaswant Singh Khalra (Ensaaf, HRW, REDRESS, CHRGI) (May 2006)
- The "Disappeared" and the Disappearance of Justice in India (Ensaaf, HRW, and NYU CHRGI Joint Letter to Congressional Human Rights Caucus) (September 2005)

Relief Committee of Greater New York

The Relief Committee was very generous in its donations for the victims of the 1984 anti-Sikh violence. They have since been channeling their resources into scholarships awarded to the young and the needy students. The scholarships have helped children buy books, uniforms and meet other school related expenses. During 1999 to 2004, the Committee granted 1039 scholarships, amounting to Rs. 15.97 lakh, to students of classes 6th to 10th, under this program.

The scholarships are granted for a period of one year to five years to students studying in Government or Government

aided schools of Delhi, Guru Nanak Khalsa Pritam Girls Senior Secondary School, Shahbad, Haryana and Sikligar students of Karnataka subject to the students getting at least 50% marks in the annual exams, and maintaining model conduct. Preference is given to children of widows or orphans.

Sikh Human Development Foundation

Sikh Human Development Foundation (SHDF) was founded in 1999 by a group of Sikh professionals in the Washington metropolitan area. It is focused exclusively to help the poor but bright students get access to wide range of professional degrees including engineering, medicine, information technology, management, accounting, journalism, agriculture, veterinary sciences and the like. Its cooperating institutions include Nishkam Sikh Welfare Council, New Delhi, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana and Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar.

The foundation started this program in 2001 by awarding 24 scholarships. It has awarded 153 scholarships in 2007 [to last year's 127] to needy students in Punjab and neighboring states in India. A total of 128 scholarship awardees have already completed their courses. For 2007-08, the average cost of a scholarship is around \$400 per annum. The awardees are selected on the basis of a test and an interview. An analysis of the scholarships for 2006-07 shows that:

- 53% of the scholarships went to male and 47% to female students.
- 60% of the scholarship recipients, boys and girls, came from villages and 40% from urban centers.
- 44% for different branches of engineering and technology, 22% for medicine and health, 20% in computer sciences and the balance for disciplines like agriculture, aeronautics, business management and journalism.
- A number of these students are children of widows, terminally sick parents, domestic servants, pensioners

and daily wage laborers in urban as well as rural areas.

- 58% of the students are from families with income of less than a dollar a day per person. In fact 39% of the students are from families with incomes of less than 60 cents per day per person."

SHDF raised over \$ 80,000 at a Fund-raising Dinner in September 2006. It tries to keep its overhead costs to the minimum with zero payroll and zero cost to SHDF for members' visits to India - these costs being borne by EC members themselves.

Guru Nanak Nishkam Sikh Sevak Jatha

Sant Baba Puran Singh Ji of Kericho who contributed selflessly to the welfare of those around him, irrespective of background, first established Guru Nanak Niskham Sevak Jatha [GNNSJ] amongst a community of Sikh settlers. It is headquartered in Birmingham, UK, with branches in India and in Africa.

The Gurdwara site at Soho Road, Handsworth was purchased around 1977 and converted in stages, with mainly voluntary efforts. Adjoining properties were acquired as years went by. Volunteer workers do not get paid and no fees are expected for any of the services or facilities provided by the Gurdwara. All the funds are raised through voluntary donations. The Gurdwara offers Langar twenty-four hours a day and has been continuously offering opportunity to get baptised into the Sikh faith every month for over twenty years.

The GNNSJ jatha has been involved with many worldwide projects including kar seva at Amritsar, Anandpur Sahib, Hazoor Sahib and Damdama Sahib. The gold replacement of Harmandar Saheb recently was also funded by them. The GNNSJ jatha has also visited Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Kofi Anann, former UN Secretary-General.

United Sikhs

United Sikhs are an advocacy and action group with their

outreach extending over parts of Americas, Europe and Asia. They have launched several initiatives over time and have been active participants in bringing relief to victims in various disaster situations like the Tsunami, Katrina and earthquakes in Gujrat, Pakistan and Indonesia. A brief account of their activities follows.

International Civil and Human Rights Advocacy [ICHRA] is intended to help advance the economic, social and spiritual empowerment of minorities, other marginalised groups and individuals in need by protecting their civil and human rights. Recent examples of their work are:

- Took up concerns with New York police on increased street violence after a Sikh was assaulted yards from his doorstep
- Coordinated with the community to secure prayer room facilities for Sikhs at JFK Airport in New York
- Worked with other Sikh organizations to secure a revision of Turban Screening procedures at USA airports. Took up employment discrimination cases with the EEOC and Department of Justice. Defended Sikh students right to wear 5 Ks in schools and colleges
- Filed the first Kirpan case in the UK since the law was passed allowing Sikhs to wear the Kirpan
- Provided legal assistance to the family of a 15-year-old Sikh student whose hair had been forcibly cut in a New York school.
- Stopped the deportation of a young Sikh single mother with a one year old child
- Persuaded the Crown prosecution Service (UK) to drop charges against a reconciled husband whose wife had withdrawn assault charges against him
- Persuaded New York Police Department to file hate crime charges against a man who had assaulted a Sikh taxi driver

Their Sikh Aid team provides non-partisan global

humanitarian disaster relief services, runs projects to help eradicate poverty and blood and health drives. GHANAIA [Giving Humanitarian Aid Necessities and Assistance Impartially to All] was set up in 2003 and has provided relief to survivors of Asian Tsunami, American Katrina and Rita Hurricane Relief, South Asian Earthquake in India and Pakistan, and the Indonesian Earthquake.

Recently Sikh Aid assisted with:

- San Diego Fire relief
- Disaster Relief in Florida Tornado
- New Jersey flood cleaning
- Earthquake victim rehabilitation through education in Poonch, Kashmir
- Rescue a Family project in partnership with a Chandigarh charity to provide financial help to families who are victims of economic suicides

United Sikhs offer Guru Nanak travel awards and Oxford Travel Aid. They are associated with community support projects for women, organizing Sikh associations in Universities and encouraging role models. The organisation is an active participant in international dialogue on multifaith issues and also works to improve understanding and treatment of minority religions, traditions and beliefs. Its programs include efforts to raise awareness about Sikh beliefs and observances through seminars, lectures and other interventions as needed. Recent projects include:

- An Educare Center in Richmond Hill, New York to provide Homework help, ESL, legal counseling and Computer training to minority communities.
- First 'Sirdar Kapur Singh scholar' selected for a joint IVY league Harvard and Wharton University Joint MBA program.
- A Sikh family in Tokyo and a Christian student in Malawi, Africa helped under project Someone With A Need [SWAN].

- Documentary film 'Fighting for My Crown' and 'One Light' by a teenager volunteer screened in Spinning Wheel film festival.
- Empowerment of Sikh students in New Delhi through Learning Values Series

In 2007 UNITED SIKHS:

- Became the first Sikh seva NGO to be associated with the United Nations through its Department of Public Information. This association is given to 'non profit tax-exempt NGOs that have an established record of continuity of work for a minimum of three years and a promise of sustained activity in the future and whose transparency is evidenced by audited annual financial statements.' This is a step to taking the needs of minority Sikh community, to international level by a Sikh NGO.
- Assisted in the making of the Sikh segment in the 2-hour documentary, "In God's Name" televised by CBS. The documentary that shows the importance of Sri Akal Takht Sahib, the supreme temporal authority for Sikhs addresses some of the most challenging and profound questions of our time, through an interview with Singh Sahib Giani Joginder Singh.
- Opened chapters in Ireland & Canada
- Filed the first case in European Court of Human Rights challenging the French requirement for Sikhs to remove their turban for their identity document photos. They also plan to file appeals to the European Court of Human Rights and the UN Human Rights committee against France ban on the wearing of the Sikh turban in French schools.
- Filed a first case in the UK, since the law was passed allowing the wearing of the Kirpan in public place, challenging a theme park for excluding Sikh youths for wearing a Kirpan.

United Sikhs plans for 2008 include:

- Developing Sikh Aid's medical corps;
- Executing a Sikh Emergency Relief Program (SERP);
- Setting up an international association of minority lawyers to meet the demands of our international civil and human rights advocacy projects;
- Setting up an Educare center in UK and Canada and launching a Sikh helpline.

Sikh Coalition

With headquarters in New York City, the Sikh Coalition was founded in 2001 in response to bias and prejudice against Sikhs in the aftermath of 9/11. It is a community-based organization that defends civil rights and civil liberties, educates the broader community about Sikhs and diversity, promotes local community empowerment, and fosters civic engagement amongst Sikh Americans. It pursues a range of proactive engagements in various forums dealing with Community Relations, Education, Government Affairs and Legal Affairs. In addition, the Coalition engages with and promotes other organizations to work collaboratively on programs of mutual interest.

The Sikh Coalition has a full-time staff of four and has three core programs to fulfill their mission:

- Legal Programs to defend through litigation, the rights of those whose rights have been violated.
- Advocacy Programs to advocate for rules and laws that are respectful of human and civil rights and work to ensure that our community is civically engaged.
- Education Programs to create an environment where Sikhs are respected and bias or prejudice is eliminated.

To give an example of activity in one of the core areas the Coalition has successfully defended the right of Sikhs in the US to carry Kirpan in over twenty cases during the six years since Nov. 2001. The incidents were spread over several states

with 4 cases in New York, 2 each in California, Ohio and Washington and others in Kansas, Maryland, Montana, Michigan, Oregon and Wisconsin.

In addition to the core program areas, the Coalition selectively engages as campaigns in a number of projects related to their mission and provides resources and promotes the work of other organizations or individuals. Currently such campaigns include:

- Human Rights
- Women's Empowerment
- Sikh Student Associations [SSA]

To illustrate the Coalition started the SSA Campaign in 2003 and has been developing its projects and initiatives with the help of SSA's and several volunteers. SSA's exist in at least 50 colleges and universities in the United States. Many have existed for a number of years others are newly formed. Membership range is wide - some with over 50 members, whereas others may only have 5. The Coalition has helped in the formation of several SSAs and:

- Supports SSA initiatives by providing educational material, coordinating speakers and participating in SSA activities.
- Helps SSAs communicate with each other, and create a cohesive network.
- Features an "SSA of the month" in its newsletter and shares information about SSA activities with the global Sikh community.
- Has run two national education campaigns by providing all the SSAs with education packets

Notable achievements of the Coalition include:

- 'Sikh Community, Over 100 Years in the Pacific Northwest' exhibit co-organized by the Sikh Coalition at the Wing Luke Asian Museum in Seattle, Washington.
- The Sikh Coalition drafted and is leading a coalition of

over 50 organizations that support the enactment of New York City's first Dastaar Legislation

- The 2nd Annual Diversity Essay Competition attracted 1600 essays from around the world.
- The Coalition has distributed over 20,000 of its 'The Sikhs' brochures. The popular brochure has been translated into English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Translations in German, French, and Chinese are pending.
- The Coalition has conducted trainings for the FBI, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Transportation, New York City Police Department, International Monetary Fund, and United Airlines. Over 5,500 agency officials, police officers, teachers, human resources professionals, and college students have received training from the Sikh Coalition on Sikhs and Sikh practices.

Sikh American Legal Defence and Education Fund [SALDEF]

SALDEF's mission is to protect the civil rights of Sikh Americans and ensure a fostering environment in the United States for the future Sikh generations. It was founded as Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force [SMART] in 1996 as an all-volunteer organization with its primary focus on media analysis and education. Based on the needs of the Sikh American community, SMART began responding to civil rights, legislative, employment, and accommodation issues.

In November 2004 it was renamed as Sikh American Legal Defence and Education Fund. As a national civil rights and educational organization its endeavor is to empower Sikh Americans through help with legislative advocacy, educational outreach, legal assistance, and media relations. They currently maintain a professionally staffed national office in Washington, DC.

Legislative Advocacy: focussed on legislative issues like hate crimes, harassment and bullying in schools, racial profiling, workplace discrimination, immigration and civil rights that affect the Sikh American community.

Government Affairs: regularly meet with government officials at the local, state, and federal level to allow for consistent dialogue on issues affecting the community.

Sikh American Community Outreach: to local communities through community forums, presentations, voter registration, and other avenues of civil engagement and encouraging members of the Sikh American community to become active participants in civil society.

Office of Media Relations: serves as a resource for reporters, conducts media analysis, monitors the media and responds to all stories that mention Sikhism and Sikh Americans and if there are inaccuracies and/or misrepresentations, the office seek to correct them. It also maintains a Sikh American News section which is updated daily.

Training Programs: develops and offers professional training programs to address cultural competency issues for private businesses and public agencies, including international air carriers, restaurant chains, and law enforcement officials. These training sessions varying from two hours to a full day, are customized to meet the needs of various agencies.

Office of Legal Affairs [OLA]: comprises of 17 attorneys who contribute their time pro bono. It is the largest legal team in the country with the mission of defending religious rights of Sikh Americans in the United States. SALDEF also collaborates with and retains law firms to pursue litigation. OLA provides the following assistance:

- Legal assistance line during normal business hours to assist Sikh Americans in need of legal advice or assistance on any matter relating the rights affecting an individual or members of the community;
- Legal referrals to a network of attorneys around the country who are willing and able to offer legal assistance

- to Sikh Americans in every geographic area of the country;
- Legal representation in association with national and local law firms, arranges for legal representation of Sikh Americans in instances where litigation is necessary;
- Legislative policy development by attorneys regularly tracking new developments in the law as they impact the Sikh community and also conduct research and writing projects to analyze the current state of the law in these areas and identify areas in which challenges lie ahead;
- Legislative advocacy in coordination with other members and officers of the organization, attorneys work with local, state and federal officials to advocate changes in regulatory and legislative policies in areas that impact the Sikh community.
- Legal research assistance by maintaining the most comprehensive Legal Database of judicial opinions affecting the Sikh community for the use of lawyers, scholars, reporters, and other interested persons.

OLA legal assistance is offered for the following issues:

- Employment Discrimination Protecting Sikh articles of faith (such as kirpan, daastar, and kesh)
- Public Accommodation
- Immigration
- Hate Crimes
- School Bullying and Harassment
- Other civil rights and civil liberty abuses

SALDEF also holds an annual dinner meeting where luminaries among Sikhs are honored for their service to the community. In their 2007 meet, they conferred the honor on my brother, Ujagar Singh who has been the driving force behind Sikh Camps for the youth for thirty years in the Tri State Area.

Slough Sikh School

The UK's first ever state funded Sikh School named Khalsa Primary School Slough was inaugurated in Sep. 2007 with over 200 children enrolled. The state of the arts school is spread over 8 acres, built at a cost more than 7 million pounds. It has 14 large classrooms, dining hall/gym, a gurdwara sahib, music room, small lecture theatre and playgrounds.

The local government funded 90% of the cost of the school with the remaining 10% to be raised by the Slough Sikh School Trust. Public would be able to rent the school facilities for educational, sports and religious events. The curriculum will offer Punjabi and Sikh studies. Every morning the pupils will assemble in the school's gurdwara sahib.

This is a landmark achievement by the Sikhs of Slough in being able to leverage the local Government's assistance for the project.

Sikh Foundation

The Sikh Foundation a non-profit and non-political charitable organization was founded in 1967. Its objectives are:

- Pass on the Sikh heritage to the growing Sikh Diaspora in the West, particularly the youth
- Introduce the world to the ethics, mysticism, arts, literature and heroism of the Sikhs
- Contribute Sikh perspectives to issues of common human concern
- Advance Sikh culture by advancing the tradition of critical and creative thinking that gave birth to the faith
- Generate the highest quality resources for the study of Sikhism

Their projects, sponsorships and collaborations include:

- Academic courses, conferences and chairs of Sikh studies at leading universities in the West
- Sikh art exhibitions and establishing permanent Sikh

art galleries at major museums worldwide.

- Renovation and Conservation of Historical Sikh monuments.
- Provide the community with highest quality of educational products on Sikhism such as books, journals, calendars, posters, displays, greeting cards, videos, CD's, tapes, DVD's and other Sikh pride building products.

The Sikh Foundation established the Kundan Kaur Kapany Chair of Sikh Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1998. After this the Foundation undertook to expand it into a Multi-Campus program and with persistent efforts, an endowed chair for Sikh Studies at UC Riverside in memory of Dr. Jasbir Singh Saini and a Fellowship at UC Irvine in memory of S. Sarabjit Singh Aurora, funded by the respective families were finalized.

The Foundation has a goal to establish 20 Sikh Studies Chairs/Fellowships in the next five years - 2 more in California, 3 on the East Coast, 2 in Canada, 9 in other parts of U.S.A, U.K. and South Asian countries plus Fellowships at some of the prestigious Think Tanks such as Institute of Foreign Studies, Heritage Foundation, Brookings Institute.

The Foundation also proposes to establish a private high school with boarding facilities that will offer Sikhism and Punjabi language courses in addition to its regular curriculum. This community-based school will be egalitarian and pluralistic in approach and will aim at developing leadership qualities in its students.

Over the years the Foundation's efforts to present the profound richness of Sikh Heritage to the western Academia have included:

- Publication of a scholarly magazine 'Sikh Sansar'.
- Selection and promotion of presentable packages existing books on Sikhism in English, as a library set and a set for children.
- Holding retreats for the Sikh youth.

- Organizing and funding international lecture tours of eminent Sikh scholars.
- Organizing Academic Sikh Conferences at University of California Berkeley and other academic institutions.
- Initiating and funding a Punjabi teaching program at University of California, Berkeley.
- Starting, supporting and funding a Punjabi Language Program at Stanford University, now in its 7th year.

Promoting Sikh Art Exhibitions: Sikh Foundation organized a small exhibition of works from local Sikh collectors and a conference, 'Splendors of the Punjab, Sikh Art and Literature', in collaboration with the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco and UC Berkeley in 1992. The exhibition was well received and with the support of the Asian Art Museum and Susan Stronge, a curator with the Victorian & Albert Museum, London [V & A] who was also a presenter at the 1992 conference, chairman of the Sikh Foundation, Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany, approached V & A for an international exhibit of Sikh art. The proposal finally came to fruition and an exhibition titled Arts of the Sikh Kingdoms opened in V. & A with nearly 300 works of art. The Asian Art Museum and the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto also consented to exhibit the collection. Over 500,000 people visited this exhibition in London [March 22-July 22 1999], San Francisco [September 22-January 9, 2000] and Toronto [May 27, 2000 - August 2000].

On 5th of April 2003, the new Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, opened its Satinder Kaur Kapany Gallery endowed by Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany with a pledge of \$500,000 to the museum. Dr. Kapany also donated nearly one hundred works of art including some of the most significant portraits of the Gurus. The Museum will work with the Sikh Foundation, international scholars, and other museums and collectors on publications, research, exhibitions and educational events on Sikh Art, and to expand the Sikh Art collection.

On 24th of July, 2004 The National Museum of Natural

History, Smithsonian, opened a Gallery named 'Heritage of the Sikhs' exhibiting the Sikh art and Sikh cultural heritage objects primarily borrowed from the Kapany Collection of Sikh Art on a long-term loan.

Sikh Foundation is presently planning a travelling exhibition of the work of Sikh artists from India, Europe and North America from the 1900's to the present. This exhibition to be named Sikh Art Now will include oil paintings, sculptures, etchings, installations, video art and conceptual art gathered from participating artists and from public and private collections in India, the US and the UK. The show will travel to 8-10 venues in the US, Canada, the UK, Europe and India after its opening in a prominent West Coast venue.

Conservation: Ms. Gurmeet Rai a conservation architect in New Delhi, while researching deteriorating Sikh monuments in India and Pakistan, located Guru Ki Massit, a mosque built by Guru Hargobind for Muslims in Sri Hargobindpur near Amritsar. In early 2000, the Sikh Foundation approved funding for conservation of this monument.

Sri Hemkunt Foundation

Sri Hemkunt Foundation, Inc. New York, was established in 1980 with its stated broad objective of sharing universal brotherhood with the community, and helping to create environment in which the children can learn the spiritual, moral, and religious teachings in a scientific manner and feel proud to be a Sikh. The Foundation promotes learning of Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script, Kirtan, Gurbani, philosophy and Sikh religion, Sikh history, culture and fine arts. The participation open to children and youth of various age groups extends over numerous centers in 9 zones on 3 continents.

In 1981, the Foundation organized a study tour of 35 children of different age groups to visit India, in order to acquaint themselves with history, culture and religion. In 1983 a symposium on "*Rana Bhabor*" written by Bhai Vir Singh was organized in which 19 children participated.

The first international symposium was held in New York in 1989 and since then the event is held annually. Sikh scholars who are held in high esteem in the community, have an impeccable record of community service and achievement in their chosen profession, and can serve as role models for the youth are invited as keynote speakers. *Nitnem* recitation was added to annual symposium activities in July 1995.

In 2007 also introduced competition in kirtan to ragas as set out in Guru Granth Sahib as an additional event. I had been invited as the keynote speaker for the symposium and had the opportunity to be present through the entire proceedings of the convention at Orlando, FL. The event is very competitive and the desire to excel was evident in those competing and more so among the parents. There seems one constraining factor. The participants are asked to read part of a book and write their take on the subject. Expectedly participants consider it safe to endorse the views of the author and none of the presentations was seen to be a critical analysis. The kirtan event was marked by absolutely stunning performance by a couple of groups.

Their 20th International Symposium to be held at Glen Rock, New Jersey from July 31 to August 3, 2008 will include kirtan competition in Raags Suhi, Sarang and Sorath. Other than the selection of different raags and books the symposium continues along its time-tested format. With the massive effort that the community and the organizers invest each year on this project it would be advisable if its design encourages, especially those in mid teens and above, to think independently on issues confronting Sikhs and Sikhi and come up with their action choices and plans so that leadership qualities are developed.

Appendix 2

GURDWARA PAHARIWALA, NEW DELHI MATA GUJRI MEDICAL AID & RESEARCH CENTER & MATA GUJRI PUBLIC SCHOOL

The local Sikh community founded Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Greater Kailash, also known as Pahariwala Gurdwara in early 1960's. The idea of adding a School and a Dispensary was mooted in early 70's. The development is a relatively affluent community in South Delhi with Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs being the property owners – several who moved in from other parts of the City as their economic condition improved.

MEDICAL AID CENTER

The beginning of the Medical Aid Center came in 1978 when, Hazara Singh, the then President of the Gurdwara got the services of Dr M S Khera, who was retiring from the Indian Air Force to offer voluntary service for three hours daily to start the medical aid center. Initially the service got off to start in the basement next to the warehouse with around five patients per day. Thereafter Dr Balbir Singh, Radiologist & Chest Diseases specialist came on board followed by Dr Manjit Kochhar, Gynecologist – significantly all three are still continuing to offer their volunteer services in spite of their advanced years. Dr Khera is in his 80's and Dr Balbir Singh is 92.

During 1980's about thirty members of the Gurdwara

Management made a commitment to contribute Rs 200 to Rs 2500 per month to meet expenses of the Dispensary. In time more members from the sangat started contributing cash and equipment for the project. Even as the facility was initially set up for the benefit of the poor, progressively some in the relatively well off neighboring community also started using the facilities. With this the interest in the project went up and the level of donations and contributions increased. At the turn of the millennium a Foundation offered to fund construction of a building to house the growing facility and eventually in April 2002 the operation was moved into the newly constructed building. A Sabharwal family, nonkesdhari scions of Bhai Tarlochan Singh contributed Rs 5,600,000 to get part of the building constructed.

Services Offered & Utilization

The facility is presently offering outdoor treatment in a range of specialties including Medical OPD, Orthopaedic, Ophthalmology, Dermatology, Cardiology, Gynaecology, Pediatrics, Physiotherapy, Radiology, ENT, Dental, Diagnostic and Laboratory Testing. In addition it also offers Homeopathy and Ayurveda as alternative medicine choices. The services are completely free for the poor. Others are required to make token payment of Rs 10 for OPD, Rs 20 for seeing a Specialist, Rs 100 for X-Ray, Rs 50 for Physiotherapy, Rs 150-250 for abdominal Ultrasound. Full Physical check up including chest X-Ray, ECG, Blood Work, Urine testing etc is done for Rs 150. There is a small charge for eye Cataract surgery. Medicines to the value of about Rs 100,000 per month are distributed free to the poor patients.

Patient data for the four month period August through November 2006 was analysed and showed the following trend:

	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Average
Total	14975	15843	13440	13339	14339
Dispensary	3862	4063	3640	3179	3686
X-Ray	465	503	371	447	446

Lab	899	959	1039	794	923
ECG	87	100	118	93	100
Dressing	274	334	228	251	272
Physiotherapy am	1358	1283	1098	1362	1275
Physiotherapy pm	669	873	677	869	772

In Physiotherapy Department that visibly has a very high utilization rate, most of the patients are self-paying. The service charge being very reasonable there are few patients receiving free treatment. For example on a typical day, Dec 21, 2006 the total number of patients receiving treatment in the morning session was 49. Of these 6 received free treatment – 2 for being staff members and 4 as being economically weak. Those given free treatment were seen to be Rikshaw Pullers, Sweepers, and Domestic Servants etc who are recognizably at the poor end of economic level. They were not asked to produce any proof of their inability to pay – the Doctor made the determination based on their representation or their occupation. 3 patients paid 50% of the normal rate – a concession extended to seniors and some relatively frugally paid occupations like Drivers working for businesses.

Patient Profile

Most of the patients are non-Sikhs – in fact Sikhs seeking treatment at the facility may be less than 5%. Even though no breakdown of patient data by their residence area, religious affiliation, gender or economic status is done the broad perception of the management is that about 85% or more are Hindus, Muslims about 10% and Sikhs under 5%. Gender distribution is fairly even with females being the main beneficiaries in Physiotherapy. Most of those coming for the Physicals, Diagnostics and Physiotherapy are middle class or better. Bulk of the patients walk upto the facility or come in Rikshaws. A family member or a hired help may accompany some. The service area seems to be limited to the relatively well off residential colonies around.

Significantly the patient profile for different departments is related to health awareness level and social resource availability of economic strata they belong to. Surely one would expect that poorer segments of society due to the very nature of their occupations should be the dominant group seeking physiotherapy interventions but they were not. Instead the facility is used by well-heeled, educated segments that could obtain the treatment, if it were critical to their well being at other facilities but by paying higher fees or by having to travel longer distances or in relatively less well-maintained environment. It is also reflective of the poor not having the time or the ability to come to the facility for regular repeat visits for treatment.

Patients coming into the General OPD are almost entirely poor and recipients of free treatment. Dr Manjit Kochhar said that most of the patients coming to the OBG are poor and they come here for treatment of infertility. This service is expensive outside and they save thousands of rupees. Patients come from as far as Gurgaon and beyond. About 30% of their patients are Muslims and the rest mostly Hindus. They cite word of mouth as the source of their information for seeking treatment here. Manjit was in Govt service in a UPSC selected position but gave up her job post 1984 pogrom against the Sikhs. At that time there were about 70 to 80 refugee families taking shelter at the Gurdwara. She saw their plight, got involved to help serve their medical needs and has since continued to provide voluntary service here in spite of a busy practice. She must have been around 30 at the time. Surely there are great stories of sacrifice and devotion here.

In the ENT side, according to Dr CS Anand, about 50% are poor. Most of the cases are for ear problems – quite a few of cancer or early cancer. About 20% have hearing problems whom he refers to his son who is an ENT specialist at Lady Harding Hospital and where it being a Govt Hospital the patients can get free treatment. In Ophthalmology department the cataract surgeries are performed at a nominal charge or

free. These can also be sponsored for Rs 3000 each case. Most of the patients are poor for the relatively well off want to go to facilities that have a longer track record.

Income & Expenditure

The hospital has a panel of about 50 Physicians, nursing and paramedic staff, medical technicians and physiotherapists. Volunteers with just 3/4 paid employees perform most of the administrative functions. Nurses and Paramedic staff are paid employees. Most of the Physicians and medical staff are non-Sikhs though the core of volunteers who started the project were Sikhs. The Administrator, Avtar Singh Bajaj who used to put in a few hours, retired from Indian Economic Service in 1990 and has since been working six half days a week as volunteer Manager.

The Income & Expenditure Statement for year ending 31 March, 2006 shows a total income of Rs 8,117,825 of which around 27 % came through contributions and donations and about 70% was generated through token payments by the patients; the highest contributors being Physiotherapy, Lab Work, Physicals and General OPD in that order. Since most of the receipts are in cash and there is a slight surplus income, the facility does not have any cash flow problems especially with a substantial non-cash expense in the form of depreciation.

On the expenditure side the salary expenses for the staff are about 23% and professional fees paid to Doctors around 32% of the total. Next high expense item is medicines and consumables accounting for about 20% and depreciation about 11.5%. Significantly there is no insurance expenditure at all – reflective of yet relatively benign risk environment in this society and also a cultural feature associated with Sikh Institutions. Incidentally the waste disposal costs are next to nothing reflective of unregulated medical waste disposal practices in this country. Cleaning and maintenance costs are even lower though the place is kept very clean possibly through volunteer support.

Management

Membership is available to individuals on contribution of Rs 31,000/= to the corpus of the Society. This contribution may be made in two instalments spread over two years. Corporations can also become Corporate Members after a contribution of Rs 15,00,000. The membership fee is Rs 3,000 per annum. Members elect the Governing Board and those in good standing for two years can be nominated for election to the Governing Board. The Society started out and still has a total of 12 active members, no associate members and none as patrons or honorary members. The Governing Board has a term of two years. Term of the Chairman and Treasurer is one year with a limit of two terms. The Governing Board elects a Managing Committee consisting of Chairman, Senior Vice Chairman, Honorary General Secretary, Secretary and Treasure from among those elected to the Board. The Governing Board also appoints Director Administrator for the Society.

Not all is well with the management at higher echelons. The Hospital Society split from the Gurdwara management recently so that they have independence in managing their affairs. At the same time they are the main users of resources and therefore need support from the Gurdwara. This does bring in its own tensions for independence absent resource self-sufficiency is difficult unless the Gurdwara management is seen as an umbrella body and there is acceptance of some oversight by them. This is an area where some tensions seem to be emerging. School Board is also similarly structured and has similar aspirations though their problems are less onerous because of their comfortable resource position compared to their needs. Gurdwara board has its own internal tensions as fallout of an aggressive electoral contest recently. There is a body of opinion in the Gurdwara management that weddings only of keshdhari Sikh couples should be solemnized at the Gurdwara.

There is also some concern about who are brought in as members from among those who may qualify by having made

the contribution of Rs 31,000. Some have been kept on the sidelines because of their political affiliations in relation to the continuing Committee members who do not want to lose their hold on the management. The term limits laid down in the Constitution are also considered a formality – a practice commonly observed in Sikh institutions. To my question if the quality of those seeking to have a role in managing the hospital was any different from the aspirants for Gurdwara leadership, the answer was a vague recognition of it as an elusive objective.

Patient Satisfaction Survey

Dr. Chander Prakash Khandelwal, Ophthalmologist carried out a patient satisfaction survey at the hospital in 2002 for his PG Diploma in Health and Hospital Management from Indira Gandhi National Open University. In a fairly detailed and well-documented report his conclusions include:

- 40% of the patients are seniors; both male and female almost 2:1
- In the age group 40 and above the female patient numbers go down; upto 40 almost even male/female ratio
- 73% patients are graduates plus and 40% would be classified as middle class upward
- Most of the patients were very satisfied with the hospital services and the charges
- 65% patients came through word of mouth referrals, 28% were walk ins and 3% saw some informative brochure or advertisement. 96% patients were willing to recommend the hospital to others
- Of the 14 suggestions received 13 respondents were Hindu patients and one Sikh, all from Kailash, GK, Kalkaji and Sarita Vihar vicinity.

MATA GUJRI PUBLIC SCHOOL

Trigger for this Brief Study

We heard the students of Mata Gujri Public School perform

kirtan at the Gurdwara on the 5th Jan 2006 gurpurb. It was a group performance, well rehearsed, simple music, rendered in a disciplined manner by about a dozen girls and a couple of boys. They were all attired in what could be their school uniform with smart grey blue blazers.

Accompanying instruments they used were the usual harmonium and tabla. Their training seemed limited to the objective of bringing them together as a sort of choral group and introducing them to Gurbani and kirtan - a model evidenced in Gurdwara settings and I did wonder about a couple of things. Firstly why would a School be content to limit itself to a Gurdwara model? Should they not interest the students in gurnat sangeet? If they did that, their kirtan would be part of or result of training in music with resultant variety in use of instruments and rendition. It would also encourage the students to enquire into the genesis and import of kirtan in Sikh worship. I wondered too where were the boys and why were they missing?

Another question that came to mind was why are Sikhs choosing to set up Public Schols attached to Gurdwaras - neighboring Kalkaji Gurdwara also has opened a branch of Guru Harkrishan Public School on their premises. Why are Sikhs choosing to set up such elitist schools - is it to help the poor and disenfranchised or is it to meet demand of ambitious middle class sangat to help their children to get into such schools more easily? Is there a possibility that some of these children may be able to make a quantum jump to higher education and achievement and thus overcome the handicaps of their poor origin more easily? How are those coming from very poor and less educated family settings coping with the academic load and school environment?

Student Profile & Facilities

According to Mr Bajaj most of the students are from poor classes - children of drivers and domestic help of the well off Sikh residents. The children of Sikh owners go to other Public

schools because they think that this is a Gurdwara school even if it is organized on Public school lines and has a beautiful building and other facilities.

Compared to this the student population at Guru Har Krishan Public School branch at Kalkaji Gurdwara is mostly from middle and lower middle class families. It seems therefore that the patronage by Sikhs of these facilities is based on their economic level. The question of purpose and mission therefore is important to examine. Is the purpose to help kids from poorer sections to make a quantum leap? Is it seva or charity or merely a device to lock in help to continue to serve their masters? In any case how do the kids fit in?

The School is spread over a 3-acre plot of land; has 1500 students, 75 teaching staff, 35 service staff including drivers, helpers, peons, cleaners, maids etc and 10 administrative employees. The tenth grade was added in 1996 and 12th grade in 2002. So far about 167 students [64 +51+32+20] have graduated after completing their 12th Grade. The school does not have an alumni association yet and therefore information on past students is not readily available but it would seem that not many exciting reports have been received. The Principal, Nirmal Grover, recalled one student who has made to the Maulana Azad Medical College – none known to have got into IIT's, Regional or other better known Engineering Colleges. She claimed that the school is highly regarded for its disciplined student body, academic results and good student/teacher ratio – 35.

Sikh students are about 50%; about 20 students are Muslims and 4/5 Christians. The rest are Hindus. No statistics are kept about Dalits or other such classes. Students come from Gobind Puri, Kalkaji, Tughlaqabad, Khanpur, Bhogal and Ashram – mainly Sikhs. Others are from nearer the school. All kids are taken to the Gurdwara every day and have a divinity class that teaches Sikhism only. At the assembly a Shabad is recited and ardas done with heads covered by all. Some Afghani Muslim students earlier did not want to participate in this and

were not forced into it. Presently none has objected. Punjabi is offered as optional; the other choice being Sankrit. Many non-Sikhs take Punjabi; choices of Sanskrit preferred by those who want better scores because it is 'like mathematics.'

There is no prompting for voluntary work even though opportunities may be at hand in the Gurdwara. The socially useful productive work is craft, needlework, gardening and computer etc. Dance lessons are in popular folk styles like bhangra, gidda, dndia, garba etc. None of the classical dance forms is taught. Musical instruments taught are sitar, tabla, dholak, tanpura etc.

During one of my visits the school was the venue for on the spot inter school painting competition. Six kids represented each school; three juniors and three seniors. They were formed into 3 groups, each given a choice of 3 subjects in both categories. The subjects were these:

- **Juniors** – picnic scene, my family, a village cricket match; village scene, visit to a zoo, save water; wedding scene, a rainy day, India of my dreams.
- **Seniors** – safe driving/sane driving, terrorism and violence, corruption a social evil; man on Mars, Commonwealth games, say no to drugs; national integration, my Delhi I care, conserve forest and energy.

Fee Structure

The fee structure ranges from Rs 700 to 900 per month with extra Rs 100 for computer and similar extra charges for activities like music. Bus charges are Rs 450 pm. Admission charges are Rs 2000. Grover considered their fee structure reasonable compared to other Public schools where the fees may be Rs 9 to 10 thousand per quarter plus admission charges of Rs 16 thousand. The admissions are made on the basis of test results.

The School gives gifted and weak children free extra coaching. It also gives a 25% fee concession to 200 or so students. Another around 100 students receive fee support from the Chairman's family trust and other donors including

one NRI Mr Bagga from the US. Till last year Nishkam was also offering assistance of Rs 100 to 200 per month to some students but they did not offer any support in 2006-7. Students who receive assistance offered by Mr Bagga are selected on merit cum need basis by the school and the School also watches their progress. Mr Bagga remits funds to the Bank on a quarterly basis.

GLOSSARY

A

Abchal Nagar: abode of the divine; the popular given name to the Takhat at Nanded

Akal Purakh: the Imortal, Eternal Being

Akal Takhat: Throne/seat of the Eternal

Akali Dal: the name of a Sikh political part

Akhand paath: uninterrupted continuous reading of Guru Granth Sahib from start to finish

Alloh: Allah

Amrit Parchar: missionary for persuading Sikhs to imbibe of amrit

Anand: bliss, state of, experience of

Ardas: supplication; a formalized invocation offered at the start & end of all Sikh religious services, ceremonies and at any other time or occasion when the devotee seeks divine support, guidance, succor or comfort.

Ardassia: the person performing the ardas.

Asa ki var: sung every morning in most Gurdwaras, this composition of Guru Nanak provides guidance to relate and live in virtue

Ashram: shelter

Auleeay: disciples

Avtaar: incarnation of god

B

Baang: the Muslim call to prayer

Badshah: king

Bahisht: word for paradise in Islam

Baisakhi of 1699: refers to the event in Sikh history when Guru Gobind Singh launched the Khalsa by introducing initiation through baptismal of the sword.

Bana: the look, attire, visible identity.

Bani: speech, composition; frequently used to describe Guru's writings.

Basudeo: a Hindu name for God

Begampura: a vision of a community free of suffering by Bhagat Ravidas

Bhagat: saint; committed to devotion of the divine

Bhakti: act or state of being bhagat

Bhai: brother; epithet commonly used for those providing liturgical services.

Bibek budhi: discriminating intellect

Bihari Sikh: Sikhs from Bihar, an Eastern State in India where large Sikh sangats are known to have existed in the time of Gurus.

Brahm giani: one credited with knowledge of the Divine

C

Charan Amrit: an initiation ceremony using the water touched by the toe of the Guru said to have been in practice till Baisakhi of 1699.

Charan Dhur: dust of the feet [of holy, of the congregation: held in reverence].

Chardhi kala: buoyant spirit

Chaupai: a form of poetic composition

Choki-literally: consisting of four; name given to group of four musicians performing kirtan; kirtan sitting at Harmander Sahib,

D

Daan: charity

Daswandh: a custom similar to tithes among Sikhs

Dera: place of, home

Dhadhi Jatha: minstrels performing kirtan to 'vir ras': a mode inspiring bravery akin to singing of ballads to traditional music and drum beat.

Dhan: wealth, economic assets, money, also used for wife

Dharam: awareness as received, path

Dharmic: relating to dharam

Dharam khand: the arena covering human action choices

Dharamsal: an inn; arena of righteousness; the name given to the congregation halls in the times of early Gurus.

Dharti: the earth, this world

Dhian: contemplate

Dakhani Sikh: Sikhs from the Southern parts of India, notably parts of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra.

Daswand: a tradition introduced by Guru Arjan commending Sikhs to contribute one tenth of their earnings to the Guru and for serving the needy.

Dastar Bandhi: initiation ceremony for wearing of turban.

Dohra: a type of verse combination

Dwapar: name for a mythical age in Indian tradition

F

Five K's: refers to five elements of Khalsa observances all of whose names in Punjabi start with the letter k.

G

Garhie: mud fortress

Granthie: caretaker of the Granth in the Sikh house of worship.

Gurbani: word of the Guru; Guru's compositions; Compositions in Guru Granth Sahib.

Gurcharni Lagana: ceremony initiating the young to Gurbani and religious tradition.

Gurdwara: the Sikh house of worship.

Gurmat: Guru's way

Gurmat Rehni: living in consonance with the Guru's teachings.

Gurmatta: name given to the collective decision by the Khalsa in a tradition used in post Guru period; literal meaning Guru's direction.

Gurmukh

Gurmukhi

Gursikh: Sikh of the Guru normally indicating an observant and committed devotee.

Guru Granth Sahib: the Sikh scripture that is treated as the living Guru by Sikhs.

Guru Panth: the Khalsa collective that was bequeathed authority by Guru Gobind Singh to provide continuing guidance and leadership to Sikhs in consonance with Guru Granth and Gurmat.

H

Har: a frequently used expression for God in Guru Granth Sahib

Haumai: a term unique to Sikh thought akin to lower self,

Hukam: the Divine ordinance under which all universes operates and our lives are lived.

Hukamnama: refers to written instructions by the Gurus in the form of letters; also refers to edicts and proclamations issued from Akal Takhat.

I

Isnan: purity, cleanliness, act of bathing

J

Jap ji: a composition by Guru Nanak that is recited by Sikhs every morning and is credited to encompass the essence of the Guru's teachings

Jan: meek, servant, attendant

Japna: reciting

Jati: celibate

Jazia: tax on non Muslims sanctioned in Islam

Jeevan mukta: liberated while still alive

K

Kaafir: non-believer in Islam, used for non Muslims in common parlance

Kakkars: the Punjabi word equivalent of k's; refers to 5 k's.

Kalyug: the mythical iron age

Karah Parshad: a ritual pudding distributed at the conclusion of religious service.

Kar seva: voluntary construction work at sacred sites

Kashatrya: the warrior caste group

Kateba: Semitic texts

Katha: discourse, exposition.

Kathakar: a person providing exposition or discourse in Gurdwara.

Khalsa: those who have imbibed the amrit and taken vows to live by Khalsa discipline.

Khan: leader, used also for a Muslim

Khande ka Pahul: baptismal of the sword; name given to the Khalsa initiation ceremony introduced by Guru Gobind Singh.

Kirat karna: earnest endeavor

Kirtan: Sikh spiritual singing mostly provided by groups of professional singers.

Kirtan sohilla: the prayer recited before retiring for the night

L

Langar: community meal served at Sikh religious services and Gurdwaras.

M

Mallech: impure, a term used by Hindus for low castes, Muslims

Mann: inner conscious, mind

Manji: a collective similar to diocese, headed by masands

Manmukh: willful or self centered as against God centered

Masaik: preacher

Masand: heads of collective Sikh sangats appointed by the Gurus; the system was abolished by the 10th Master

Matha Tikana: ritual ceremony to bring a newborn to the Gurdwara in obeisance to the Guru.

Maryada: tradition, accepted continuing practice.

Maya: illusory; traditionally a term used for the worldly allurements.

Mazhbi Sikh: Sikhs belonging to lower castes like Dalits.

Miri Piri: a doctrine attributed to the sixth Guru that recognizes that since religious life has to be lived in the midst of temporal realities a true man of faith has to be an active and involved social being willing to defend and make sacrifices for his beliefs.

Morcha: protest march, organized protest

Muni: quietists, those suing to connect with the divine observance of silence

N

Naam: name; in Sikh theology it represents the qualities and attributes associated with Akal Purakh, the immanent Divine presence and the essence of Godhood that pervades all our lives and the devotee is persuaded to connect with through prayer, seva, meditation, contemplation and righteous living.

Nishkam: altruistic, without expectation of reward, selfless

O

Ouriya Sikh: Sikhs from the Eastern Indian State of Orissa understood to go back to the Guru period. For more information Himadri Bannerji's work on Eastern Sikhs would be found helpful.

P

Paigambhar: prophet

Palki: palanquin used for ceremonial carriage of Guru Granth Sahib

Pangat: the tradition of sitting in rows in langar, symbolic of equality of all devotees

Panj Pyaras: refers to the 'elect five' at the Baisakhi of 1699; the institution of elect five has come to be accepted as the traditional way to resolve issues and to provide collective leadership within the community.

Panth: path; the global corporate Sikh community

Parda: veil, practice of

Partal: an intricate musical composition in which the rhythm varies from stanza to stanza

Parupkar: altruism

Patit-ta: sinfulness

Pauri: step as in ladder, stanza

Pir: sage, savant

Piri: saintly as against worldly; name given to branch of manji

Prabh: a popular name for God

Q

Qazi: sharia judge

R

Ragi: professional musicians performing kirtan at Sikh religious services.

Raja: ruler, chief

Rahitnama: code of conduct

Ranjit nagara: war drums, literally drum beat of the victor

Rebeck: rabab, a string instrument used by Mardana, companion of Guru Nanak

Rehni: refers to the moral, ethical and spiritual principles that inform the way one lives.

Rehras: the evening Sikh prayer around sundown

Roja: Muslim practice of fasting

Romalla: usually expensive fabric coverings used to wrap or cover Guru Granth Sahib

S

Saadh Sangat: association with the holy; seekers of the divine.

Sabat Soorat: look associated with a Sikh fully observant of 5 k's.

Sachkhand: the abode of Truth

Sacha patshah: the true king, used for God/Guru

Salok: verse

Sangat: company that one keeps; association; congregation.

Sanyasi: ascetic

Sarbat Khalsa: a tradition of Khalsa collective meeting in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib convened to deliberate upon and take decisions by common counsel.

Sarovar: water tank, frequently attached to Gurdwaras for convenience of the pilgrims.

Satyug: the muthical golden age when truth prevailed

Serai: inn, place for travelers to rest

Seva: voluntary service in aid of the needy.

Sevadar: those engaged in providing service including paid employees in the Gurdwara.

SGPC: Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee, the central Gurdwara mangement body established pursuant to the 1925 Gurdwaras Management Act.

Shah: banker, king

Sikhi: the Sikh way; Sikhism.

Sikligar Sikhs: Traditionally lower caste ironsmiths making or polishing weapons. With changing times they have become nomadic and are economically backward.

Silsila: sufi sect group

Simran: recitation, remembering

Sirgunm: a Sikh who having been kesdhari has shed his/her hair.

Shabad: word, speech; composition or hymn from Guru Granth Sahib; revealed 'Word'.

Sodar: a composition by Guru Nanak, included in both morning and evening prayers; literally 'that door' referring to the door to the abode of God

Surgindoo: heaven

T

Taal: musical beat; measure of rhythm

Takhats: high seats of Sikh religious authority.

Taksaal: Sikh seminaries

Tankhah: chastisement or expiatory penalty imposed for commitment of a default from the prescribed code of discipline/conduct in accordance with the SRM.

Tann: human body, physical

Topchi: gunner

Trayta yug: one of the mythical ages

Trishna: desire

U

Umrao: ruling elite

V

Vand chhakna: sharing

Var: a ballad like poetic composition

Varan: Hindu caste grouping

W

Waheguru: hail to the Guru, popular Sikh name for God

Y

Yama: messenger of death

Yamuna: name of a river originating in Himalayas in northern India

Z

Zakat: the Muslim practice similar to tithes

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